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RM-4170-ISA  
SEPTEMBER 1964

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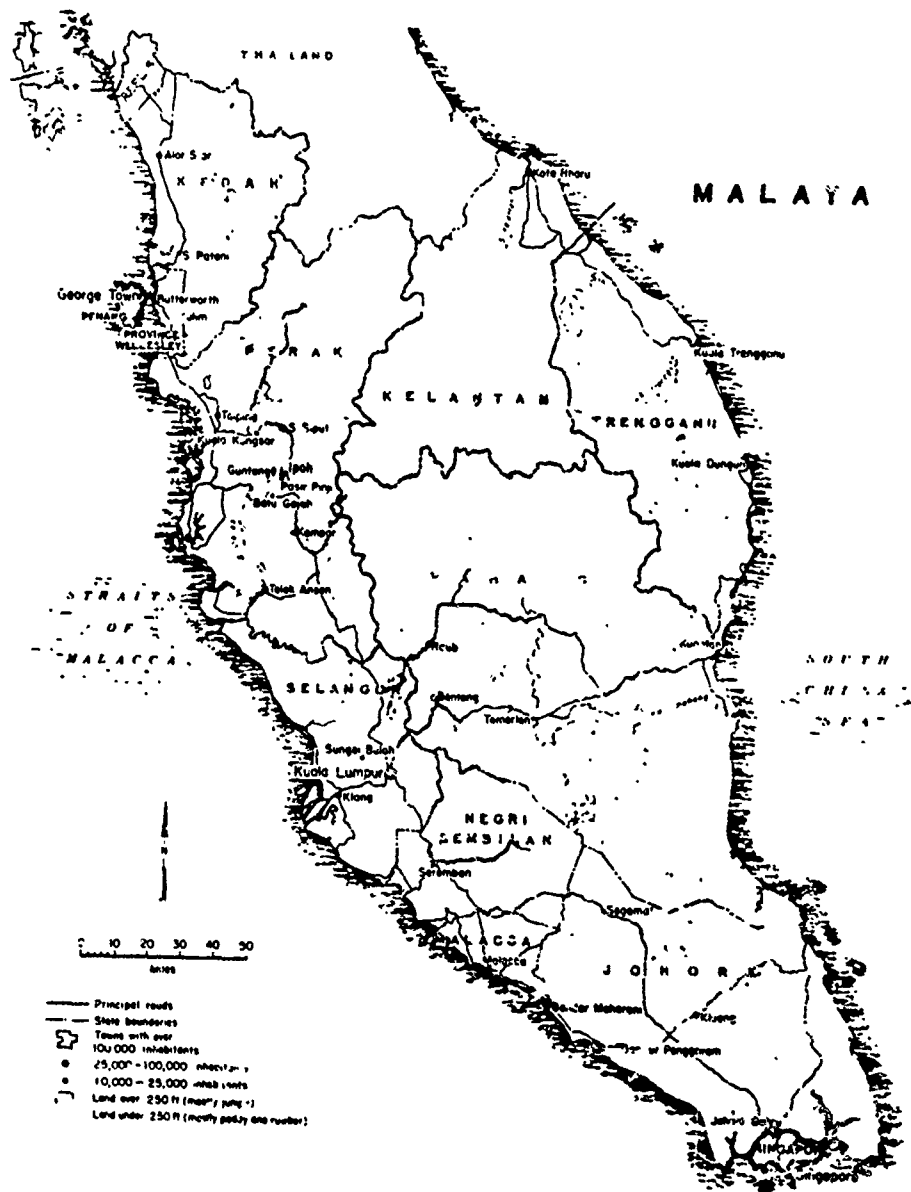
ARMY OPERATIONS IN  
MALAYA, 1947-1960 (U)

Riley Sunderland

PREPARED FOR:  
THE OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY  
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PREFACE

The research for this Memorandum was sponsored by the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense, International Security Affairs. The RM is the first of a series that covers different aspects of the British campaign against the communist terrorists in Malaya between 1947 and 1960. In dealing with the military side of the campaign it provides the background for the subsequent, more specialized analyses. Air operations, including the vitally important air supply function, are discussed in this paper on army operations, as they were integrated with and essential to the activities and the success of the ground forces in Malaya. The present Memorandum will be followed by RM-4171-ISA, Organizing Counterinsurgency in Malaya, 1947-1960(U); RM-4172-ISA, Antiguerrilla Intelligence in Malaya, 1948-1960(U); RM-4173-ISA, Resettlement and Food Control in Malaya(U); and RM-4174-ISA, Winning the Hearts and Minds of the People--Malaya, 1948-1960(U).

The papers in this series are independent treatments of separate topics, which together form a comprehensive picture, for it was the combination and interaction of the practices and policies described in all five that

defeated the Communists. The studies do not, however, constitute a history of the Malaya campaign; the chief aim throughout is to discern and evaluate the methods used by the British.

For the bulk of his information, the author is indebted to the War Office and other British government archives, where, between April and November 1962, he was generously given access to records of the Emergency. He also interviewed a number of British and Australian participants in the campaign, whose contributions of views and factual data are acknowledged individually in the footnotes, and he has drawn extensively on the regimental records and professional journals of the British army. In this country, the author has used relevant classified materials in the custody of the Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence (U.S. Army), and the Research Analysis Corporation.

Though the majority of written sources cited in this Memorandum are secret, titles and descriptive subject headings are unclassified throughout. Documents identified by numbers preceded by the initials ID may be found in the ACS/I (USA) files; those bearing the letters IAC are in the custody of the Research Analysis Corporation.

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SUMMARY

The victory over the communist insurgents in Malaya may be attributed to the defenders' ability to overcome the problems of jungle warfare and to their success in the areas of organization, antiterrorist intelligence, resettlement and food control, and the winning of popular support. This mastery was achieved gradually, the result of experimentation and of lessons learned through error as well as success.

The following Memorandum is concerned primarily with the tactics and techniques of the campaign. It discusses some of the characteristics and major problems of jungle warfare in general and of the situation in Malaya in particular, and describes the chief approaches and methods that enabled the ground forces of the Commonwealth to defeat the insurgents.

At the start of the Emergency, as the 1948-1960 conflict came to be called, the insurgents enjoyed several advantages. They were operating in a country that was about 80 per cent jungle and thus favored the guerrilla, and they were able to exploit the serious racial problem created by the large Chinese population. Though numbering 38 per cent of the country's population, the Chinese were virtually

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unrepresented in its administration, and about half a million of them were "squatters" living outside the structure, and thus the surveillance, of Malaya's society. With the aid of weapons left over from World War II, the guerrilla organization was able to arm and equip 12,000 men and women, and it could count on strong support among the unarmed population. In keeping with communist practice and doctrine, the insurgency began with a campaign of terrorism launched by small and elusive rebel groups.

The British forces, with their recent experience of anti-Japanese combat in Burma, understood the importance of preventing the guerrillas from progressing from the initial phase of the terrorist incident to the more sophisticated stage where rebels become capable of forming regular units and launching large-scale operations. They also had available to them the manpower and skilled leadership needed to forestall such a development. While thus able to contain the insurgents, the British defenders won valuable time in which to perfect crucial nonmilitary techniques.

First and most important among the latter was the "resettlement" program. Under it, the great majority of the Chinese squatters were moved from the jungle fringe, where they could easily furnish the guerrillas supplies

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and information, into fenced and defensible new villages. This measure inhibited the passage of arms, ammunition, and information between citizens and guerrillas. It also facilitated control of the sale, distribution, and consumption of food, to the point where food control became a most powerful weapon. And, by putting representatives of the government into close touch with the population, resettlement made it possible for the authorities to reach people's minds and win their support, and for the police to build up an effective intelligence system.

The ultimate refinement of food control was the elaborate "food-denial" operation -- the starving out of guerrillas in a given area -- which was to become the basic operational concept of the Security Forces. By watching village gates, checking traffic, and organizing the central cooking of rice, the military were able to destroy the channels by which the terrorists normally obtained their food, thereby either starving them or forcing them to accept the risk of ambush and capture by venturing into areas that were effectively patrolled.

As for the strictly military techniques, the defenders, again benefitting by the successful experience in the Burmese jungle, appreciated from the start the importance

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of air supply, which freed them from dependence on ambush-prone ground lines of communication. They were somewhat slower to realize that relatively brief operations involving many troops, though they prevented the guerrillas from forming large regular units, inflicted few casualties among them. Routine patrols and ambushes by small units, on the other hand, took a steady toll, and soon became the accepted methods of jungle warfare.

Tactical movement was crosscountry, on foot, away from roads and trails, and in virtual silence, for the aim was to surprise the guerrilla, attack him in accordance with a much-rehearsed drill, and outshoot him. Small patrols operated out of simple bases that depended upon concealment for their security. The men were trained and equipped to live in the jungle for weeks on end. British, Malay, and Gurkha soldiers proved that they could acquire woodcraft and learn to track the guerrilla to the point where the jungle no longer offered him dependable shelter.

Artillery, deprecated at first, soon came into its own as a means of harassing the insurgents and forcing them to move and thus give evidence of their presence to the trackers. It was used also to destroy some of their camps and to deceive them about the plans of the Security Forces.

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A final and priceless asset of the Commonwealth forces in Malaya was air power. Helicopters and other aircraft were invaluable for the strategic movement of troops, reconnaissance, casualty evacuation, crop spraying, personnel transport, and some highly successful precision bombardment of occupied camps. Most important of all, and the foundation of British jungle operations, was their use for air supply of troops.

In order to coordinate and control these military and nonmilitary endeavors, the British organized a pyramid of war executive committees at the national, state, and district levels and in still-smaller administrative areas. Each committee, consisting of the senior soldier, policeman, and government representative and their staff, with the civilian official in the chair, directed the entire counterinsurgent activity at its level by issuing the necessary orders to the military, police, and civil authority.

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PART 1

THE BACKGROUND OF THE CAMPAIGN

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### I. MILITARY OPERATIONS IN THE LARGER CONTEXT

Ever since 1947, armed forces of the Commonwealth have been engaged in military operations against communist guerrillas in the Federation of Malaya. Officially, the "Emergency," as it came to be known, lasted from 1948 until 1960. But the Gurkhas, the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry, and the Malay Regiment had been fighting guerrillas in Malaya before 1948, and, at the time that this was being written, soldiers and police still patrolled a broad strip of jungle below the Thai border, beyond which several hundred communist terrorists were thought to shelter.<sup>1</sup>

The terrorists sought refuge in Thailand because they had been soundly beaten in Malaya. By 1947-1958, their armed forces were in part demoralized and in part won over, and the large majority of them surrendered. Most of those who had rebelled in 1948 were dead, some of hunger, some from disease and wounds, and the greater number directly from the guns of soldiers and police.

Military action, however, was only part of the inter-related activities that defeated the Communists. It

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<sup>1</sup>Interview with Mr. Anthony Short, official historian, Federation of Malaya, London, April 1962.

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would not have been successful without good intelligence and the resettlement of Chinese squatters. Yet intelligence and resettlement would have been meaningless if the armed forces had been defeated. If, for example, the Commonwealth had been inept at jungle warfare, as were the French in the north in Vietnam, the whole structure of the anticommunist defense would have been swept away in the military debacle. Because military victory was thus the foundation of the entire effort, it has seemed well to begin this five-part study of the counterinsurgent campaign in Malaya with a brief discussion of the background of the Emergency followed by a detailed description of army operations.

Antiguerrilla practice as it was developed in Malaya exploited the fact that the guerrilla must eat. He can save his ammunition; he can even do without it for a time and obtain arms by strangling or knifing sentries, he can hide for long periods. But he must have a certain minimum of calories and vitamins lest he starve or sicken. A guerrilla operating in the tropics must also have drugs, or malaria and infection will kill him. If lack of food is certain death, lack of information means probable death. The driving need for food and information forces

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the guerrilla to keep in touch with the people. To inhibit or intercept this contact, the government can regroup people in fenced and policed villages, which permits the imposition of curfews, control of travel, and inspection of parcels, and forces the guerrilla to seek information and food from these guarded villages.

The routes to and from the villages, through wooded areas and fields, over which the guerrilla and his sympathizers must travel are lines of communication; they are as vulnerable to ambush, raid, and blocking as lines of communication have always been.

Along those routes in Malaya. 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, the Security Forces were operating. The wooded areas of Malaya are jungle, jungle fringe, and rubber plantation. Thanks to their experience in Burma in World War II, the Commonwealth forces knew how to live, move, and fight in the jungle for days and weeks on end. They had the priceless asset of air supply, so that food, drugs, and ammunition could reach them without having to pass along slow, ambush-prone ground lines of communication. They moved silently through the jungle without noisy chopping and without using trails. Their combined use of patrol during the day and ambush at night was

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deadly, and steadily at away at the guerrillas' numerical strength.

At the same time, the police intelligence service -- or Special Branch, as it was called in Malaya -- was active in the villages. To obtain food and drugs, the guerrilla had to have friends in the villages who would try to smuggle them out. This meant contacts and organization, the targets for Special Branch. Agents (both single and double), bribery, and psychological warfare were among the means used to penetrate the communist organization in the village and thus to obtain the information that told the soldiers in the jungle when and where to ambush.

Food restrictions, Special Branch activity, and resettlement would have been greatly handicapped without popular support. Special Branch, for example, could not always count on highly detailed reports from its agents about the exact plans of the terrorists. Much of the time, it had to piece together a multitude of fragments of information. One such fragment might be the fact that at 5 o'clock every Tuesday night a young Chinese, locally unknown, was seen by a rubber tapper to walk into the jungle fringe. The tapper did not have to pass his

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observation on to the police; doing so might bring him little or no reward and entail a good deal of danger. He therefore had to be persuaded that telling was a worthy act. If many people held this conviction, this was due in part to a comprehensive program of action, visibly directed toward the building of a free and prosperous Malaya and publicized by a vigorous information program.

Directing these activities was a most ingenious command and control system. At every level of government, from the Federation capital in Kuala Lumpur to the police circle in the village, an executive committee brought together the civil power, the military, and the police. Under the chairmanship of its civilian member, each committee issued orders to military, police, and civil authority, worked within the frame of broad directives from higher up, and was kept up to date on intelligence. Military, police, and civil authorities were represented in the same operations room. Thus, intelligence, civil affairs, and military operations were coordinated, and the resulting plan took account of every aspect of Malayan society.

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Since the various committees were linked by radio and telephone, whereas the Communists depended on couriers walking through the jungle, the Security Forces had a much quicker reaction time than their foes. They could withdraw troops, saturate an area with patrols and ambushes, score successes, and return the troops before the widely scattered communist headquarters could receive and evaluate the news of the troop withdrawal and execute a counteraction.

Early successes in jungle war made resettlement and food control possible. This in turn yielded profitable targets for the army and for police intelligence. Successes were reported to the public. Reassured by them, the populace increased its support, which resulted in more and better intelligence. To make these varied activities mutually supporting required their careful, continuing integration, which the command and control system provided. Thus, army operations, resettlement and food control, police intelligence, public information, and the system of command and control continually interacted to produce victory in Malaya.

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## II. THE TERRAIN

The Communists, on the Chinese model, did not attempt revolt in the cit, of Singapore or on the small island it dominates. Ant guerrilla operations in Malaya took place on the peninsula itself. Roughly elliptical and running from northwest to southeast, the peninsula is some 400 miles long and 200 miles across at its widest part. The border with Thailand to the north runs through wild forested country; the Security Forces did not attempt to cordon or fence it.

The peninsula's most important terrain feature is the jungle, which covers 80 per cent of Malaya. No site of economic or social significance is more than a few hours' march from the jungle. Consequently, the force that most effectively moves and fights in the jungle controls Malaya; who rules the jungle rules Malaya.

Primary jungle, that is, forest which has never been cut back for farming, is very thick and relatively free of undergrowth. Its trees are about 150ft high, and visibility on the ground is about 25yds. Neglected clearings, by contrast, quickly become secondary jungle, a dense mass of bush, creeper, and bamboo that is very hard to penetrate. Along the rivers and coasts of

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Malaya are many great stretches of swamp. As one moves in from the sea or up along the rivers, the ground rises to the 7,000ft mountain chain that forms the backbone of the peninsula.

For the soldier, the climate changes little from season to season. Noon averages 90°, but the frequent late-afternoon thunderstorms are followed by nights that are clear, quiet, and cool. The airman, on the other hand, finds that topography and the monsoon combine to complicate his days. The windward sides of the mountains get heavy, often continuous rains, while strong winds can give the leeward very turbulent air. The thunderstorms that soak the soldier in the afternoon pour out of cumulus clouds. The northeast monsoon, which blows from late October to the end of March, brings heavy rain and low clouds east of the mountains, less so on the west. April/May and October, especially, are times of heavy rain and frequent thunderstorms. The southwest monsoon, from late May or early June to September, brings intermittent rains to the southwest.

The soil of Malaya is fertile, so that rice, tapioca, and vegetables grow quickly and easily. Fourteen per cent of Malaya's surface is given to rubber plantations,

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2.4 per cent to rice, and 2.1 per cent to coconut and oil palms. The country is not self-sufficient in rice, but only because rubber has been so much more profitable.

The road net of Malaya at the beginning of the Emergency had extensive main highways, down which the Japanese had driven and cycled in 1941-1942, but surprisingly few feeder roads. The great rubber plantations lie on the west side of the mountains and in Johore State at the south of the peninsula. Through them, like a spinal column, run the main north-south road and the meter-gauge railway to Thailand.

The jungle offers marked problems for the soldier. Visibility is bad, and the fields of fire are poor. Command and control are difficult, placing a premium on the initiative and training of the individual soldier and the ability of the small-unit leader. One battalion commander has said that the limiting factor in the number of patrols he could send out was the number of good patrol leaders in his battalion, not the number of men on hand. Troops who are thrust into the jungle without training and indoctrination fear it, but the quiet, dense gloom of the rubber plantation also frightens the

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newcomer.<sup>2</sup> This initial reaction, however, can be quickly dispelled by good training. How well and how quickly the European can come to be at home in the jungle as a result of good training is suggested by the performance of some of the British troops. Thus, in May 1952, the 1st Battalion of the Suffolk Regiment had the highest number of kills in Selangor State. It was consistently among the best in Malaya.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>The above data on terrain were taken from Director of Operations, Malaya, The Conduct of Anti-Terrorist Operations in Malaya, 3rd ed., 1958 (hereafter cited as ATOI), pp. I-1/2, CONFIDENTIAL; Maj. Gen. S. W. Kirby et al., The War Against Japan, Vol. 1: The Loss of Singapore, H. M. Stationery Office, 1957.

<sup>3</sup>"25 Field Regiment History, 1 April 1952 - 31 March 1953," Appendix A, SECRET.

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### III. THE CHINESE MINORITY

In addition to the problems posed by the Malayan jungle, the government had to face the fact that about 38 per cent of the people in Malaya were Chinese, as against 49 per cent Malay and 12 per cent Indian and Pakistani. In 1947 they numbered 1,900,000 and formed the heaviest concentration of Chinese living outside China.<sup>4</sup> These Chinese were not assimilated in Malaya; most of them spoke neither Malayan nor English, and took no part in government. With a few exceptions, they stood apart.

The Malayan Chinese community held the classic Chinese view of the state, in which the secret society, the clan, and the provincial or dialect grouping discharged many of the state's functions. Disputes over property, debts, and women were settled by arbitration or private violence. The clans and secret societies controlling the state would use their power for their own interests,

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<sup>4</sup>"Area Handbook on Malaya," Subcontractor's Monograph prepared by members of the University of Chicago faculty (Norton S. Ginsburg, gen. ed.) for the Human Relations Area Files, Inc., New Haven, Conn., prelim. ed., 1955, mimeographed (hereafter, "Malayan Handbook"), p. 500; Victor Purcell, The Chinese in Southeast Asia, Oxford University Press, London, 1951, p. 2 (table).

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and the rest of the community tended to shun the officials in self-defense. Soldier and policeman were seen as the lowest of the low. This was reflected in the fact that Malaya in 1947 had only 24 Chinese inspectors and 204 rank and file in a police force of some 10,000.<sup>5</sup> The government of Malaya seemed alien and remote to the Chinese community. For many Chinese, "government" was synonymous with "European," and they were reluctant to join government service, for to do so meant that they would have to associate with other races.

When a Chinese turned to communism, he was apt to regard it as a movement of and for the Chinese, something of a grand secret society, and his sentiments were often marked by the most virulent racism.<sup>6</sup> Secret societies are a feature of Chinese life and have long been popular with overseas Chinese. The Malayan Communist Party was rife with secrecy, conspiracy, and malignancy.

Family ties were important to the Chinese, and seemed to extend farther laterally than is the case among

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<sup>5</sup>Federation of Malaya, Annual Report (hereafter, Federation Report), 1947.

<sup>6</sup>Lucian W. Pye, Guerrilla Communism in Malaya, Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J., 1956, pp. 131, 135, 201, 202, 207.

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Westerners. Thus, the Chinese village shopkeeper, who in Western eyes would seem to have every reason to protect his property against a communist triumph by passing on what gossip about the terrorists came his way, was likely to have family ties to the local terrorists and to think it his foremost duty to send food and information out to them.<sup>7</sup>

The problem of the Chinese element in Malaya was aggravated by the phenomenon of the "squatters." This went back to World War II and the Japanese administration, when food shortages and unemployment had prompted some 500,000 Chinese to flee to the countryside, there to occupy untilled land on which they built bamboo huts, grew crops, and raised families. These squatters were outside the realm of Malayan administration; without police, magistrates, postmen, telegraph, firemen, or health officials, they had only the schoolteacher that any Chinese community will seek to provide for its young. It was natural, therefore, that the squatters became a major source of food and other support for the guerrillas.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Interview with Mr. Richard West, London, 1962. West is a Malayan civil servant, now retired, who served throughout the Emergency.

<sup>8</sup>For discussions of the squatter problem see Lt. Gen. Sir Neil M. Ritchie, KCB, KBE, DSO, MC, ADC, Commander-in-Chief FARELF, "Report on Operations in Malaya, June 1948

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Part of the problem of the unassimilated alien community, of Chinese reluctance to mingle with other races, was the language barrier; very few police and administrators spoke the language of the people with whom they were supposed to work. The English or Gurkha soldier fluent in Chinese was a rarity.

Various expedients were tried to bridge this language gap, and with some success. In 1948 the small Junior Civil Liaison Corps was formed to provide interpreters and advisers to the military. Also, a system of conscription was introduced in 1951 by which more Chinese were brought into the police.<sup>9</sup> As a result, by 1952, the police included 281 Chinese inspectors and 2,191 rank and file.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, it would not be inaccurate to characterize the conflict in Malaya as one in which

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to July 1949," GHQ Singapore, September 6, 1949 (hereafter, "Ritchie Report"), pp. 22, 25, SECRET. See also Federation of Malaya, "Communist Banditry in Malaya: The Emergency June 1948 - June 1951," Department of Information, Kuala Lumpur, Chapters 10 and 11; J. B. Perry Robinson, Transformation in Malaya, Secker & Warburg, London, 1956, p. 81.

<sup>9</sup>Lt. Gen. Sir Harold Briggs, KCIE, Director of Operations, Report on the Emergency in Malaya (hereafter, Briggs Report), The Government Press, Kuala Lumpur, 1951, p. 87, SECRET.

<sup>10</sup>Federation Report, 1952.

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Malayan and British administrators, British, Gurkha, and Malayan soldiers, and British and Malayan policemen were trying to put down an outbreak of guerrilla war in a Chinese community.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>With the exceptions indicated, the information in the foregoing section is based on "Malayan Handbook," pp. 104-105, 116, 123, 393, 397, 412, 500, 524, 592; and on Guerrilla Communism in Malaya, pp. 131-135, 201, 202, 207.

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### IV. THE POLITICAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE SITUATION IN 1947-1948

At the beginning of the Emergency, the Malayan peninsula was ruled by a newly organized federal government of limited powers, which the Malays regarded as their government and seemed willing to support. The British, for their part, favored it as a step toward elected government. These attitudes proved a great asset.

The Japanese occupation during World War II had seriously weakened the administration by killing some of its members, corrupting others, and leaving a legacy of hatred between those who had left Malaya to continue the fight against Japan and those who had stayed to share the lot of the people they had once governed. The mass migration of the Chinese squatters to the jungle fringe had reduced governmental strength still further. Indeed, as late as 1950 many areas were officially described as still virtually unadministered. The communist power had flowed into such vacuums, and in 1947 there were areas in which the Malayan Communist Party was described as the real governing authority. Early in the Emergency, the

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Communists probably regarded them as very nearly, in their phrase, "liberated" areas.<sup>12</sup>

Malaya had never been a British colony. During the nineteenth century, nine Malay states, ruled by as many sultans, accepted British protection and pledged themselves in return to accept the advice of a British resident. In the years that followed, the British respected Malay sensibilities, maintained the prestige of the rulers, and did not overreach themselves, and the several Malay states enjoyed a generous measure of autonomy. The federal form of government instituted before World War II did not affect the actual distribution and exercise

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<sup>12</sup>Speech by Lt. Col. J. K. Shephard, GSO I (Ops) FARELF, at Far East Military Attachés' Conference of March 21-23, 1950, in "FARELF Quarterly Historical Report," March 31, 1950, Annex, SECRET. Richard West, in an interview in 1962, told the author that he had found it impossible to conduct the 1947 Census of Malaya, as the local inhabitants would not cooperate. His report to the capital that the trouble lay in the opposition of the Malayan Communist Party prompted his skeptical superiors in Kuala Lumpur to send an investigator, who confirmed West's opinion. Diplomatic efforts on the part of the government caused the local party leaders to reverse their policy and consent to the census, whose results, they had concluded, would be useful to them. West also believed that in 1948 the aggressive element within the Malayan Communist Party used the areas under de facto party control to support its argument that the time had come for armed revolt. (Cf. hq Malaya District, "Fortnightly Intelligence Review," No. 74, January 22, 1948, SECRET..)

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of power in Malaya, for British high commissioners, though by law supreme within their sphere, in practice took no action that was not supported by a majority of their advisory council. Except for a few hundred British subjects in top positions, the Malays had a monopoly of the civil service, and title to land was in effect reserved to them.

After World War II, the British Labour Cabinet imposed a political settlement upon Malaya that it thought more in keeping with the spirit of the times. The sultans of the nine Malay states became pensioned figureheads. Under the new constitution, the Chinese were to receive citizenship and full equality of rights, including admission to the higher civil service. These measures were designed to end the Malays' privileged position and force them to compete on even terms with the Chinese. The Malays, wary of competition from the astute and industrious Chinese, expressed strong resentment at these arrangements, as well as at the manner in which the British had obtained what was represented as Malay consent. As a result, the 1945 constitution was short-lived. In late 1946, the Colonial Office in London began negotiations for a government that would more

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nearly correspond to Malay wishes.<sup>13</sup> A new constitution went into effect on February 1, 1948. The government it established was one for which the Malays seem to have been willing to work, pay taxes, and fight. The Chinese, on the other hand, showed some hostility to it.<sup>14</sup>

The central government created in 1948 presided over nine Malay states and two colonies. At its head was the High Commissioner, to whom both the Crown and the several Malay sultans had delegated their powers over foreign affairs and defense. The sultans agreed to accept his advice on all matters except those affecting Malay faith and customs. The Legislative Council, composed of the High Commissioner, three ex-officio members, eleven departmental members, fifty unofficial members, and one representative of each state had carefully defined powers to legislate for the Federation as a whole.

At the next level, each Malay state was governed by its ruler, his private council, and a legislative council. A British adviser had the power of advice except on matters of Malay faith and custom.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup>Lennox A. Mills, Malaya: A Political and Economic Appraisal, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1958, pp. 7-8, 34-36.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>15</sup>Russell H. Fifield, The Diplomacy of Southeast Asia: 1945-1958, Harper & Bros., New York, 1958, pp. 399-400.

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The whole structure was financed locally, not by the British Treasury. Local authority had no guarantee that, if it exceeded its resources, the Treasury would help.<sup>16</sup> Some of those who had to operate under it found this structure cumbersome and complained that the process of obtaining approval for expenditures was slow and inflexible.<sup>17</sup>

Personnel for the country's public administration was recruited largely in Malaya, with four-fifths of the posts so filled reserved to the Malay community. At the top of the pyramid was the small, elite Malayan Civil Service. These men had been recruited under such rigid standards that they were known locally as "the heaven-born." The honors degree from a university was a prerequisite; "firsts" at Oxford or Cambridge were common. In 1948 this group probably numbered under three hundred. Of these, thirty-six were Malayan, and the rest British. At any given time about 20 per cent of the British were likely to be on leave.

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<sup>16</sup>Director of Operations Appreciation of October 25, 1950, in Briggs Report, p. 43.

<sup>17</sup>Director of Operations, Malaya, Review of the Emergency in Malaya from June 1948 to August 1957 (hereafter, Report on 1948-1957), p. 12, SECRET.

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<sup>16</sup>Director of Operations Appreciation of October 25, 1950, in Briggs Report, p. 43.

<sup>17</sup>Director of Operations, Malaya, Review of the Emergency in Malaya from June 1948 to August 1957 (hereafter, Report on 1948-1957), p. 12, SECRET.

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Below the Civil Service was the Malayan Public Service, which did the day-to-day work of government. It was divided into two divisions, of which the first was described officially as the senior cadre of the several government departments. In 1948, Division I of the Public Service probably had something under 2,500 members, of whom about 30 per cent were British. Altogether, there were about 2,500 British civil servants and administrators in Malaya.

The war and the Japanese occupation had had a bitter impact on the public servants of Malaya. Many of those who had remained in the country were deeply resentful toward those who had left to continue the fight, and few, if any, of the former Japanese prisoners had been able to shake off the memory of the infamous Changi jail by 1948.<sup>18</sup>

Division II of the Malayan Public Service was recruited locally, with the exception of police lieutenants, nursing staff, and the small number of prison staff.

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<sup>18</sup>C. Northcote Parkinson, Templer in Malaya, Donald Moore Ltd., Singapore, 1954, p. 36; Interview with West; Federation of Malaya, "Malayanisation of the Public Service: A Statement of Policy," 1956, LD 2033206; Federation of Malaya, Report of the Committee on the Malayanisation of the Public Service, 1954, App. I & II, ID 948103.

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These exceptions were to be of administrative interest after the Communists began their insurrection.<sup>19</sup>

Lt. Gen. Sir Harold Briggs, looking at the personnel problem in 1950, as he took the post of Director of Operations, said that Malaya was short of trained civil servants on the ground. Reinforcements were few, young, and untrained. Effective strength was lowered still further by the fact that leave and retirement provisions remained on a peacetime basis. The state governments, in Malay hands, were reluctant to appoint Chinese. Briggs concluded that most of the technical departments of the government in 1950 were 40 per cent understrength.<sup>20</sup>

To sum up, at the beginning of the Emergency wide areas were unadministered because there was no one to do the job, no one who spoke Chinese, and no money in the local treasury to pay qualified administrators if they could have been found. The limitations on the High Commissioner's powers, the small number of British subjects in the Malayan Civil Service present at any one time, and the comments in reports of senior officials

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<sup>19</sup>"Malayanisation of the Public Service."

<sup>20</sup>Briggs Report, pp. 3-5.

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suggest that, in 1948, the British role in Malaya was to advise and assist local authority, that the British were not in a position to give orders to the Malay authorities, and that in matters of Malay customs and faith -- a most generous exemption, for in the East there are few things not a matter of faith or custom -- the Malays proceeded at their own pace.

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### V. THE BRITISH ARMY IN MALAYA

In June 1948, there were present in the Federation of Malaya 5,784 combat troops, supported by 5,660 service troops. Close at hand, in Singapore, and under the same headquarters, Far East Land Forces (FARELF), were 6,903 combat troops and 11,339 service elements, or a grand total for FARELF of 12,687 combat and 16,999 service troops.<sup>21</sup> Once the Emergency had been declared, combat units were quickly moved from Singapore into the Federation, leaving behind only a garrison of two or three battalions, and reinforcements came in from the United Kingdom, Hong Kong, Australia, New Zealand, East Africa, and the Fiji Islands. From 1948 to 1952, the number of combat troops in the Federation rose to about 22,000; it remained at about that level until 1957, and then dropped down to 14,241 by March 31, 1960. Service troops reached a peak of 8,853 in 1950 and then declined.<sup>22</sup> Throughout this period, the great Singapore Base District supported both Malaya and Hong Kong, and was prepared to

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<sup>21</sup>See Fig. 1

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

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Fig. 1  
FIGHTING AND ADMINISTRATIVE TROOPS COMMITTED TO THE MALAYAN EMERGENCY\*

As of Mar 31	Malaya		Singapore		Total Mal & Sing		All troops Malaya	All troops Singapore	All troops Mal & Sing
	F	A	F	A	F	A			
1948	578	5660	6903	11339	12687	16999	11444	18242	29686
1949	**	**	**	**	19417	19290	**	**	38707
1950	**	**	**	**	18523	13674	**	**	32107
1951	19896	6061	3044	9003	22940	15064	25957	12047	38004
1952	22226	6531	2624	9074	24850	15605	28757	11098	39855
1953	21102	6587	2749	9631	23851	16218	27689	12380	40069
1954	20340	7413	2100	9765	22446	17178	27759	11865	39624
1955	20347	8346	1935	9559	22282	17905	28693	11694	40187
1956	22518	8853	2458	9574	24976	18427	31371	12032	43403
1957	21345	8188	2174	9941	23519	18129	29533	12115	41648
1958	17241	6564	3201	9836	20441	16396	23800	13037	36837
1959	13550	5365	4840	8145	18390	13516	19321	12955	32276
1960	14241	5429	4821	7785	19072	13214	19670	12616	32286

\*Table prepared with the help of Brig. C. I. V. Jones, MI, British War Office, from data supplied by the Statistical Section of the War Office. (Fighting troops are shown under "F" and administrative troops under "A" above.)  
\*\* Breakdown between Malaya and Singapore not available.

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support mobilization in case of general hostilities. The responsibility for Hong Kong was no sinecure. When major reinforcements went there in 1949, they drew their equipment from Singapore Base District. Its reconditioning and issue was described by FARELF as a major burden.<sup>23</sup>

These troops were not tied down by the Communists and therefore could have been employed elsewhere. The original plan behind assembling the six Gurkha, three British, and two Malay infantry battalions that were present in Malaya in June 1948 had been to create an imperial/theater reserve built around the 17th Gurkha Division. This concept of a reserve was kept in mind throughout the Emergency. Thus, in the first quarter of 1950, two infantry brigades were on five weeks' notice for movement elsewhere.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>"Ritchie Report," p. 41.

<sup>24</sup>Letter from GHQ FARELF to GOC Malaya et al., October 1947, CR/FARELF/1821/G(Ops), SECRET; "Quarterly Historical Report," FARELF, G(Ops/SD) Branch, for the period ending March 31, 1950, SECRET; interview with Maj. Gen. L.E.C.R. Perowne, London, 1962 (General Perowne at one time commanded the 17th Gurkha Division).

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### PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE

One great asset of the Commonwealth forces was that, when the Emergency began, the British and Gurkha soldiers knew jungle war from their experience in Burma in World War II and were improving their skill by continual practice. Of the nine British and Gurkha battalions present in June 1948, six had fought in Burma in World War II. Two of them, the 1st Battalion of the 7th Gurkha Rifle Regiment and the 1st Battalion of the 10th (Princess Mary's Own) Gurkha Rifles, had the added advantage of having fought communist guerrillas in Burma after the war before being transferred to Malaya. They found the problem in Malaya very similar to what it had been in Burma: troops completely dependent on the police for information on and identification of guerrillas; lack of information the greatest handicap; and the guerrillas expert at ambush and minor tactics but incredibly bad marksmen.<sup>25</sup>

The skills gained in Burma did not grow rusty in Malaya between 1945 and 1948, for there was widespread

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<sup>25</sup>"Quarterly Historical Report," 1/10 Gurkha Rifles, September 30, 1948, SECRET; "Quarterly Historical Report," 1/7 Gurkha Rifles, March 31, 1947, SECRET.

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unrest. In the last quarter of 1947, one company of the 1st Battalion of the Malay Regiment was stationed in the Kaki Bukit and one in the Pauh area to restore the confidence of the local inhabitants. In September, bandits in the Klian Intan region were strong enough to ambush a bus, killing eleven and wounding thirteen, with the entire police escort of six among the casualties. Kuomintang guerrillas were active and sought to exercise sovereignty in selected areas. In April 1948, police, supported by a company of the 1st Battalion of the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry, raided and destroyed a number of their training camps but could not bring them to action.<sup>26</sup>

Early in 1948, Malaya District, the division-type headquarters responsible for military operations in the Federation, found that antibandit operations were becoming steadily more serious and that disorder was increasing. Though officially called "bandits," the people causing the trouble were uniforms. In late May 1948, Gurkha

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<sup>26</sup>Documents found in the camps disclosed that KMT Chinese, under orders thought to have come from China, had established a number of strongpoints across Malaya to keep communism from moving south. "Quarterly Historical Report," FARELF, G(Ops/SD) Branch, June 30, 1948, Annex I, SECRET; "Quarterly Historical Report," North Malaya Sub-District, 3rd Quarter and 4th Quarter, 1947, SECRET.

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battalions were showing the flag in Johore. All moves were tactical, and detachments were to be self-supporting for twenty-four hours.<sup>27</sup> Clearly, there was serious trouble before the Emergency was proclaimed, and the military was aware that matters might become worse.

### THE PROBLEMS UNDERSTOOD

The higher command in Malaya fully understood the advantage they derived from being able to operate effectively in the jungle. They knew that it came from their experience in Burma and believed that it gave them a strong edge over their French neighbors in Vietnam. In October 1948 their G-2 predicted that the French would be beaten because inadequate forces, unversed in jungle war, were dispersed in scattered garrisons with vulnerable lines of communication.<sup>28</sup>

Not only did the British military in Malaya know jungle war and have complete confidence in their ability

<sup>27</sup>"Quarterly Historical Report," G Branch, Malaya District, May 14, 1948, SECRET; "TYREP ISUM" No. 1, North Malaya District, 1948, SECRET; "Operation instruction" No. 7, Johore Sub-District, May 31, 1948, SECRET; "Quarterly Historical Report," Johore Sub-District, June 30, 1948, SECRET.

<sup>28</sup>FAREFE Intelligence Review, October 1948, SECRET.

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to fight it, but they also had an accurate appreciation of what the Communists would try to do in view of what they had recently done in Greece and in China. General Sir Neil Ritchie, looking back on the first three months of antiguerrilla operations in Malaya, compared this experience with what he knew of events in Greece and China and told his senior officers that, in communist doctrine, guerrilla war unfolded in three phases: (1) gaining control of small areas by terrorist methods; (2) enlisting and impressing the natives into fighting units; (3) operating from these areas as firm bases. Some months later, he wrote that communist guerrilla doctrine presupposed relatively static conditions, and that a defensively-minded policy on the part of the Security Forces, therefore, would be fatal. No matter how meager the information, it was, in his words, essential to adopt an offensive military policy. The enemy had to be continually harried and kept on the move to disrupt his training and to prevent his organizing into large units. Looking at China, Ritchie wrote that the Nationalists had locked up a great proportion of their resources in small defensive packets, had lost the initiative, and with it most of China. The Commonwealth forces, he concluded,

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would have to resist all demands to break into small static units and thereby make sure that they would always have adequate forces for offensive operations. Ritchie's belief that the best defense was a strong attack was to be faithfully applied in the years ahead.<sup>29</sup>

### BATTALION ORGANIZATION

When the Emergency began, infantry battalions were on what the British call the "lower establishment." They provided 12 platoons, each of about 30 riflemen, allow for normal absenteeism. Battalion strength varied with the ability of the War Office to find men to fill vacant slots, which is not easy in peacetime. The average battalion had about 600 officers and enlisted men. Thus, on September 30, 1949, the 1st Battalion of the Suffolk Regiment numbered only 32 officers and 566 other ranks; by March 31, 1950, it had 33 and 650, respectively.<sup>30</sup> In January-February 1951, battalions went onto the "war establishment," which gave them another rifle company and put them at a little over 800 on the average.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>29</sup>Minutes of the Commander-in-Chief's Conference at GHQ FARELF, September 21-22, 1948, CR:FA:SLF/5565/G(Ops), SECRET; Ritchie Report, pp. 4-5, 5-6.

<sup>30</sup>cf. relevant issues of the "Quarterly Historical Report," 1st Battalion, the Suffolk. SECRET.

<sup>31</sup>At the higher establishment, battalions were allowed 840 officers and men, of whom 250 were administrative. Interview with Maj. Gen. Frank H. Brooke, one-time Director of Operations, Malaya, London, 1962; Federation Report, 1951, p. 7.

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Fig. 2

## UNITS COMMITTED IN MALAYA\*

	Jun '48	Jan '49	Oct '50	Aug '51	Jun '52	Jan '53	Jun '54	Jan '55	Jan '56	Jan '57	Aug '57
Armored Car Regts -		1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1
Armored Car Sqns -		-	-	-	-	1	1	1	1	1	1
Field Regts	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	1
Field Btrys	-	-	1	1	1	1	2	2	1	2	2
HAA Btrys	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	1	1
Field Engr Regts	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	2	2	2	2
Infantry Bns	10	15	19	19	21	23	22	22	23	23	21
Commando Brigs	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Malayan Scouts	-	-	1	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
22nd Special Air Service Regt (3 Sqns)						1	1	1	1	1	1
New Zealand Sqn SAS Regt	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	1
Sqn Parachute Rgt	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	-

\* Report on 1948-1957, App. B.

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The arms used by these battalions presented no novelties. The innovations to be found in army operations were in the tactics and strategy employed, as will be demonstrated below. In 1955, when the infantry in Malaya had been brought to a point of formidable counterinsurgent efficiency, battalions were armed as follows:<sup>32</sup>

Fig. 3

## EQUIPMENT OF INFANTRY BATTALIONS IN 1955

Weapons	Gurkha	British	Malay
Rifles	667	561	614
Bren guns	70	70	64
Vickers, .303 medium MG	6	6	-
Browning, .30 MG for armored vehicles	(as issued)	(as issued)	-
Browning, .50 HMG	-	5	-
Mortar, 2in	22	22	12
Mortar, 3in	6	6	4
Mortar, 4.2in	-	2	-
Flamethrower	4	4	4
3.5in rkt launcher	23	23	-
17pdr AT gun/120mm bn			
AT weapon ("BAT")	6	6	-

The Gurkha and British battalions were armed and trained for major operations against a first class enemy.

<sup>32</sup>The following data are taken from the official equipment tables for 1955, ID Nos 2013660, 1278101, 1269969, CONFIDENTIAL.

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One may surmise that the Malay battalions of 1955 were armed less elaborately because of the difficulty of training mortar crews, antitank crews, maintenance specialists, and ordnance units at a pace commensurate with the fourfold expansion of the Malay Regiment and during a campaign in which there was less need for them than for hardy riflemen and machine gunners who were at home in the jungle.

The armament of the rifle companies supports the theory that the Malay units were organized with a view to putting the maximum number of men into the jungle:<sup>33</sup>

Fig. 4

## RIFLE COMPANY HOLDINGS IN 1955

Weapons	Gurkha	British	Malay
Rifles	105	95	123
Bren guns	11	11	13
Browning, .50 HMG	-	1	-
Mortar, 2in	4	4	3

Heavy weapons, such as 3in mortars and antitank weapons, are not shown under rifle company holdings, not because

<sup>33</sup>  
Ibid.

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of any conditions peculiar to jungle war, but rather because they were under centralized battalion control in a company specializing in their use and maintenance. Battalion could attach them to smaller units as the situation might require.

Infantry battalions of the Commonwealth were much more nearly self-contained than their American counterparts, and the next-higher echelon, the brigade staff, was correspondingly light on quartermaster and supply. Battalions could be freely moved from one brigade to another, and a brigadier would be prepared to command anything from two to five battalions, which with attachments of artillery, armored cars, and engineers would be close to a light division. The engineer organization would be based on a company supplemented by civil contractors for camps, roads, bridges, and water supply. The battalion needed twenty times more water per head in Malaya than in London.<sup>34</sup>

At any given time from the early 1950's onward, about one-third of all infantry battalions in Malaya were

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<sup>34</sup>Interview with Gen. Brooke. The laundering of cotton uniforms and frequent showers were features of Malayan life; troops in the United Kingdom did not have these needs.

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Gurkha, one-third British, and one-third from Malaya and the Commonwealth. The number of Malay battalions rose steadily as more Malay NCOs, officers, and cadres were trained.

The workhorse battalions of the Emergency were those from the Brigade of Gurkhas. By 1954, six had been there for six years, the other two for five; they had eliminated over 1,500 Communists at a cost to themselves of 150. Though a mountain folk from three- to ten-thousand-foot altitudes, the Gurkhas take very well to jungle war, so well indeed that by 1953 in Malaya they had learned to dispense with trackers and to follow the guerrillas' trails through the jungle as well as or better than the aborigines. The Gurkha is a farmer's son, who enlists to follow the Gurkha trade of war until he has earned a pension, then to retire and buy his own farm. His first enlistment is for four years, of which a full nine months is spent in training before he joins his battalion. After three years he receives a six-month home leave. Up to warrant ranks he has the same chance of promotion that a British soldier enjoys. By examination he may become a Queen's Gurkha Officer, and finally a Gurkha Commissioned Officer (who is fully commissioned and has

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the same status as a colonial officer). By 1962 the first Gurkha had passed out of Sandhurst and been given the Queen's Commission <sup>35</sup>

The British battalions spanned the range from the Brigade of Guards to the old county regiments of the British Line. Contrary to the impression given in some of the literature, the Guards were no less effective in combat than other battalions, to judge by their score in kills. Nor did they lack initiative, as shown by a little party of the Coldstreams who were cut off from base by a large group of terrorists: they returned after a few days, very tired and hungry (for they had originally been sent out for a few hours' patrol), yet all present and with trophies from the Communists they had killed.<sup>36</sup>

The performance of British battalions varied widely, from the unlucky or unskilled battalion that bagged only one guerrilla in a stay of nine months to the Suffolks and Hampshires who were deadly. The informal consensus was that the highest scores were made by battalions from county regiments raised in farming country, whose troops were

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<sup>35</sup>"The Brigade of Gurkhas," The Infantryman, July 1954, CONFIDENTIAL.

<sup>36</sup>Appendix B to "Quarterly Historical Report," 2 Coldstream Guards, June 30, 1949, SECRET.

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prepared to wade through the muck of the swamps, or lie quiet and alert in ambush, for days at a time.

### PERSONNEL PROBLEMS

Part of the difference in performance between British and Gurkha battalions, perhaps the major part, can be found in the personnel problems of the British infantry. The British patrol often was under a drafted NCO of eighteen months' service leading men with less than two years'. The Gurkha NCO would be a ten-year veteran, and his men would have had an average of four to five years of fighting in Malaya.<sup>37</sup>

At the higher establishment, British battalions in Malaya had about 800 men. At any given time in any given battalion, the commander would have about 100 long-term career soldiers 300 regulars doing a three-year hitch, and 400 National Servicemen. If the battalion was in Malaya three years, all slots filled by National Servicemen would have changed at least once and some even twice, all three-year regulars would have changed once. This meant that something over 1,500 men would pass through

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<sup>37</sup> Director of Operations, Malaya, Annual Report (hereafter, Director's Annual Report), 1954, p. 9, SECRET.

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such a battalion during its tour in Malaya. In a rifle company, only five or six men, officers included, had more than five or six years' service. Company commanders changed rapidly. When it is recalled that this was a campaign fought by the small-unit leader, it is plain that the combat efficiency of the British battalions reflects great credit on these men as well as on their senior officers who directed the campaign.<sup>38</sup>

The Malay battalions were good, and they were still better as they became more experienced. A Muslim of fighting stock, the Malay gave the impression that he felt he was defending his homeland against Chinese attack.<sup>39</sup> A good measure of professional skill, the kills-per-contact ratios of Malay and British battalions over the three years 1953-1955 show nothing to choose between them.

By common consent, the Fiji battalion was the best in Malaya. The days of tribal war were not far behind the Fijians, and the old skills of war and fieldcraft

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<sup>38</sup>Brigadier .C.A. Henniker, Red Shadow Over Malaya, Wm Blackwood & Sons, Ltd., Edinburgh and London, 1955 (hereafter, Henniker), pp. 192-193.

<sup>39</sup>Interview with General Brooke.

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were still keen and polished. The Fiji Scouts first saw action against the Japanese in World War II. As the Emergency dragged on, the Fiji Islands raised a battalion and sent it to Malaya.

The Fiji technique was to divide the battalion area into zones through which ranged patrols of varying size. Most were small, but some were really formidable, so that the Communists never knew what to expect. The Fijians' senses were extremely acute, they could move through the jungle with great speed and silence, and their unvarying practice was to attack. The Communists, not knowing how many were attacking, would turn and run. But the Fijians, who were superb trackers, keen shots, and of fine physique, were well-equipped to outrun their prey. The reports, unfortunately, lumped their scores with those of the East African battalions, whose performance was less outstanding, but, even so, the Fijians retain an impressive edge over the Gurkhas.<sup>40</sup>

### EQUIPMENT

The weapons used by Commonwealth infantry battalions held no novelties. Until late in the Emergency, when the

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<sup>40</sup>Henniker, p. 118; Federation of Malaya, "Weekly News Summary," November 7, 1953.

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extremely powerful FN rifle became an item of issue and every rifleman had one, the rifleman used the familiar Enfield rifle. The patrol's lead scout would carry an automatic shotgun, a Bren gun would be available to give a blast of firepower, there might be a submachine gun or a carbine (or two, or none, for fashions changed), and the rest were rifles. Grenades were carried. Because contacts were, literally, fleeting, the heaviest emphasis was placed on marksmanship; experience had taught that loosing a burst of rounds in frantic haste did no good, whereas it took only one aimed shot to kill a terrorist.

Medium and heavy machine guns, 4.2in mortars, 25pdrs, 3.7in howitzers, 5.5in guns, and heavy antiaircraft all played valuable supporting roles. They were used by the infantry units in placing prophylactic fire on likely ambush areas, sweeping through jungle to drive terrorists onto a line of ambushes, placing surprise concentrations on camps, and firing at random through areas to keep the Communists awake and interdict likely routes.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup>For a more detailed treatment of the subject see the later sections in this Memorandum dealing with air support and artillery support, respectively.

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Signal communication was built around the issue radios, whose number increased steadily. The small reconnaissance or security patrols did not carry them because of the weight involved, but all other patrols had one radio each, and normally would check in to the patrol base or battalion as soon as they had made their bivouac.<sup>42</sup>

### TRAINING

The preparation of men and units for jungle war changed between 1948 and 1960 as views evolved and new facilities were developed. Thus, the Scots Guards went to Malaya in 1948 on what seems to have been an emergency basis. They found that their standard of training was low, for they had been heavily involved in ceremonial duties in London and had been brought up to strength for the occasion with men who had not even finished their basic training. The Scots Guards taught marksmanship first, and the men had to master snaphooting. Second came silent movement in jungle and swamp, and soldiers were taught to lay ambushes, follow tracks and destroy

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<sup>42</sup>Major R. S. Garland, MC, "Operations in Malaya," The Australian Army Journal, April 1959.

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camps. Third came junglecraft, which meant developing a man's jungle endurance to the point where the length of time he spent in the jungle would not be a major limiting factor.<sup>43</sup> The importance of marksmanship training was underscored by a contemporary estimate that only 1 of 10 soldiers being trained in the jungle training center at Kota Tinggi could hit a bandit at 30 yards.<sup>44</sup>

At the end of 1949, the Scots Guards spent two months retraining in Singapore. They reviewed their state of training in the light of combat experience, and introduced standardized tactical measures and drills as aids to inexperienced NCOs and junior officers. Early in 1950 the replacements began coming in. Each went through a three-week course of patrolling, batt'e drill, and ambush training. In 1951 the 2d Battalion felt that its training program and its experience had produced a steady improvement in the kill/contact ratio.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup>2d Battalion, the Scots Guards, Malaya, 1948-1951, Erskine Camp, Kuala Kubu Bharu, March 5, 1951 (hereafter, Scots Guards), pp. 22-23.

<sup>44</sup>"Minutes, Commanders' Conference, FARELF, 25-26 April 1949," Annex to "Quarterly Historical Report," G(Ops/SD) Branch, GHQ FARELF, for quarter ending June 30, 1949 (hereafter, "Commanders' Conference, 25-26 April 1949"), SECRET.

<sup>45</sup>Scots Guards, pp. 22-23.

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By 1952 the procedure had changed, as administrative and operational conditions became more stable. The 1st Battalion of the Somerset Light Infantry was with the British Army of the Rhine when it was alerted for Malaya, and promptly began training for jungle war in the German pine forests. Company commanders were flown out to Malaya to attend jungle war training courses before the battalion docked. The men, upon arrival, underwent two months' training at the Far East Training Center at Kota Tinggi, and there drew their vehicles, equipment, and weapons. More signallers were trained, and dog handlers were selected and trained. Every rifleman learned how to live in the jungle, how to lay ambushes, and how to defend himself against that menace. Two years later, the Somersets spent—from August 12 to October 12, 1954, retraining.<sup>46</sup>

One battalion handled its replacement problem with a six-week program: two weeks spent in being acclimated; two, in learning to live and shoot in the jungle; and

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<sup>46</sup>Kenneth W. Whitehead, History of the Somerset Light Infantry (Prince Albert's), 1946-1966, Wm. Clowes and Sons, 1961 (hereafter, The Somersets); The Light Bobs Gazette (regimental paper of the Somerset Light Infantry), January 1955.

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two more on long patrols under selected instructors in quiet areas.<sup>47</sup>

In the latter years of the Emergency, the process approximated the following. The infantrymen and the specialists did their basic training in their several training centers, Gurkhas and Malay troops in Malaya, others in their respective Commonwealth countries. The jungle warfare course had 167 hours of practical instruction, 10 of demonstration, 12 of lectures, and 6 of discussion. Of the 167 practical hours, 110 were given over to 4-1/2 days in the jungle (for a man can carry five days' food), 24 to a preliminary day in the jungle, 16 to immediate-action drill, 8 to jungle navigation, 4 to motor-transport ambush, 3 to observation and tracking, and 2 to jungle marksmanship. Demonstrations and lectures laid the foundation for this.<sup>48</sup> An expert local opinion was that the average infantryman, if he

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<sup>47</sup>Major R.C.G. Foster, MC, History of the Queen's Royal Regiment, Vol. 9, Gale and Polden Ltd., Aldershot, p. 15.

<sup>48</sup>ARMLO (U.S. Army Liaison Office), Singapore, "Scope of Regular Courses of the FARELF Training Center," IAC 1195356; U.S. Liaison Office, Malaya, "Training, Organization, and Facilities in Malaya and Singapore," May 16, 1953, ID 1174136. The latter is an excellent general source on the problem.

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had completed this training schedule, would be fully acclimated after his third week in Malaya.<sup>49</sup>

Advanced individual training in several aspects of jungle war, in weapons, and in signals was given to NCOs, to British and Gurkha junior officers and specialists, and to the advance echelons of incoming battalions from overseas at the FARELF Training Center in Kota Tinggi. Graduates of these courses would return to their units, there to act as instructors. The center ran nine courses a year of three-weeks' length for thirty-six students each.

Once the advance echelon and the specialists were trained, unit instruction began at any available station in Malaya that offered training space and range facilities. How unit training was conducted in late 1959 is shown by the program of the 1st Battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment. Its aim was to acclimatize the unit in all respects so as to render it fully operational within eight weeks, and to have the men master operational techniques in preparation for antiguerrilla operations.

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<sup>49</sup>Letter from Deputy Director of Army Health, FARELF, to Director of Army Health, War Office, March 27, 1957, ID 2043549.

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The training stressed the importance of the following:

- (1) a kill with every shot; (2) knowing where you are;
- (3) the security of the small unit; and (4) the use of normal command structure wherever possible. Immediate-action drills were to be used on the first contact to save time or to regain the initiative. To be able to kill with every shot was thought to require of the soldier confidence in his ability; well-developed powers of observation and hearing; mental alertness and physical fitness; and the faculty to maintain or seize the initiative by quick alignment of weapon and rapid firing.

The program also taught that attention to the individual and to his arms and equipment must be continuous. Every commander was held responsible for the comfort of his force; nothing was said to be gained by subjecting troops to unnecessary hardship.

After the first three weeks of training, all roads outside the camp area were classed as dangerous, vehicle seating and rapid dismounting were practiced, and there was vehicle-ambush drill at every opportunity while moving to and from training areas.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> 1st Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment, "Training Instruction," 3/59, Malaya, September 23, 1959.

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The actual unit training was divided into 157 periods,  
as follows:<sup>51</sup>

Background lectures	3
Equipment care and use	2
Foot immediate-action drills	14
MT immediate-action drills	10
DZ and LZ preparation; air supply problems	8
Ambushing by day	10
Ambushing by night	7
Attack on a guerrilla camp	9
Jungle navigation	12
Jungle marksmanship	11
Jungle hygiene	2
Jungle cooking	3
Night-lighting equipment and firing	5
Base drills	7
Tracking demonstration	3
Open range	7
Practical exercise	25 (incl. 6 at night)
Administration	12
Reserved	7 (to be allocated by the Cnds)
	<u>157</u>

Completion of unit training was only the beginning of the battalion commander's work in that field. Replacements had to be trained as they arrived (several hundred during a three-year tour), and the general education program, to fill deficiencies in schooling, was almost as great a burden. There were also the promotion courses, and the courses for specialists, such as signalers, dog

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<sup>51</sup>Ibid.

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handlers, bandsmen, and clerks, and experts in motor transport, demolition, scout cars, pay, and marksmanship coaching. Between January 1, 1958, and August 31, 1959, one battalion offered twenty-one courses, which were attended by 1,319 students and successfully completed by 999.<sup>52</sup>

An attempt to relate performance during training to performance in combat yielded one positive result: battalions whose teams did well in rifle competitions also did well in ambushes. No correlation was shown as regards patrol encounters, and there was only a very low correlation between a battalion's scores in classification shooting, in which its members were classified according to their skill with the rifle, and its later success in killing guerrillas in patrols and ambushes.<sup>53</sup>

Personnel turnover was a major drawback, which was only partly remedied by training. Combat experience tended to be limited to unit and patrol leaders. The average soldier in any given year had but one chance in

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<sup>52</sup>Statistics of the 3d Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment, on courses given or administered between January 1, 1958, and August 31, 1959.

<sup>53</sup>British Operation Research Section, Far East (hereafter, BORS/FE), Memo No. 4/54, SECRET.

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ten of being involved in a contact at all, and only one in thirty of firing a shot. For example, if he was walking toward the rear of the patrol at the time of contact, he might only hear the order to deploy and the shots fired by the leading two or three men before the guerrillas disappeared from view and the task became one for the trackers. On the rarer occasions when a soldier was near the lead and actually able to get off a shot or two, he might well forget his training in the excitement of seeing a guerrilla and commit some elementary blunder.<sup>54</sup> It was, therefore, essential that army operations be part of sound operational concepts -- aggressive jungle patrolling, food denial, etc. -- to compensate for these deficiencies.

The combat efficiency of the various battalions could be measured in two ways, of which the first, the kill/contact ratio, was the accepted one.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup>BORS/FE, Memo No. 6/53, p. 1, SECRET.

<sup>55</sup>A "contact" was a meeting between Security Forces and guerrillas in which the former opened fire first.

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Fig. 5

### THE BATTALIONS' KILLS-PER-CONTACT RECORD 1953-1955<sup>56</sup>

Battalions	1953	1954	1955
Fiji and East African	1.03	1.20	1.17
Gurkha	1.00	1.02	0.98
Malay	0.62	0.76	0.65
British	0.63	0.65	0.78
(Average)	(0.82)	(0.88)	(0.87)

One officer suggested to the author that "kills-per-round-expended" would have been a more reliable measure, for in at least some battalions there were soldiers who, aware of the weight given this index, would not always report contacts that yielded no kills.<sup>57</sup>

The second measure of combat efficiency was the average of eliminations per battalion. The following table is of interest in expressing, numerically, the differences in performance mentioned earlier.

<sup>56</sup>Director's Annual Report., 1954, p. 9; *ibid.*, 1955, p. 10, SECRET.

<sup>57</sup>Interview with Brigadier David D. M. McCready, London, 1967. (One may wonder whether patrols had to account for ammunition expended.)

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Fig. 6

THE AVERAGE OF ELIMINATIONS (1953-1954)  
ACCORDING TO THE BATTALIONS' GEOGRAPHIC ORIGINS<sup>58</sup>

Battalions	1953	1954
Fiji and East African	60.5	42.0
Gurkha	32.7	28.1
Malay	15.7	14.5
British	22.8	16.0
(Average)	(28.4)	(21.3)

The several infantry battalions used in Malaya were the basic building blocks for army operations. Their discussion, however, must not be allowed to obscure the fact that the higher formation, the 17th Gurkha Division, was an infantry division in every sense of the word. Armed, organized, trained, and ready on short notice to fight as a division, it had its armored cavalry, division artillery and division artillery headquarters, from nine to twelve infantry battalions, three brigade headquarters, engineers, Gurkha signals, transport (locally enlisted

<sup>58</sup> Idem.

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Malays), Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineer shops, Gurkha military police, and on through all the units and specialties that make a division a fighting team. Had the Chinese Communist and Vietnamese armies moved south, the 17th Gurkha Division, supported after n days by Anzac formations and its sister, the 1st Federation Division, would have moved north against them.<sup>59</sup>

### SPECIAL UNITS

Three highly specialized units were used in Malaya, and another appeared but briefly. A FARELF commanders' conference decided in April 1949 that it would not ask for paratroops. They were not thought worth the necessary overhead, they were neither tactically nor technically suited for the type of warfare involved, and their use to reinforce a threatened area could not then be envisaged.<sup>60</sup> The FARELF decision may have been influenced by the way the French were using paratroops in Vietnam; certainly, British doctrine was most emphatic in warning against tying troops down to a static defense where they might be besieged and would then need reinforcement by airdrop.

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<sup>59</sup>Interview with Gen. Perowne; Mills, Malaya, p. 147.

<sup>60</sup>"Commanders' Conference, April 25-26, 1949."

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Not until 1956 did paratroops appear in Malaya, and then only a single squadror.

The specialized units that did appear were custom-made for antiguerrilla operations in the jungle. In April 1953 the Federation of Malaya announced the reactivation, for the third time since 1846, of the Sarawak Rangers. These are Borneo tribesmen -- the Iban -- attractive, quick-witted, hospitable folk, who are excellent trackers and warriors. The Iban were recruited in 1948 to aid the Security Forces in following the guerrillas through the jungle. They immediately proved their worth and got on so well with the British soldiers that the latter came to regard it as an honor to be invited to spend their leave days in an Iban longhouse. By 1953 it seemed worthwhile to organize the Iban, and some four hundred were enrolled. Veterans among them became junior NCOs, and attachment to battalions on a section and platoon basis provided officers and senior NCOs. Unique badges and a flag acknowledged the regimental spirit.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>61</sup>Federation of Malaya, "Weekly News Summary," April 3, 1953.

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A branch of the Special Air Service (SAS) Regiment, the long-range penetration arm of the British services, became operational in Malaya in January 1951. Their original mission was to operate in deep jungle, more than two days' journey from the nearest motorable track. SAS members were volunteers, each an accomplished fighting man and the product of the most rigorous commando training that made him a highly-skilled professional. Their doctrine called for their establishing base camps deep in the jungle, which then could be resupplied by air and use air transport as needed. Once such an austere base was operational, patrols moved out from it. The individual soldiers who went into the jungle on foot carried up to seventeen days' rations of rice and curry. Weapons were a matter of personal taste. SAS tactics were based on immediate-action drills in response to a signal from the first man to see the enemy. The analogy between a patrol and a professional football team suggests itself. The regiment's reports went directly, for action or response, to a level comparable to corps or division, depending on the situation, and in this sense the role of the SAS was thus strategic rather than tactical.

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The last of the specialized units was the Special Operational Volunteer Force. It consisted of surrendered enemy personnel (SEPs), who had defected from the Communists and volunteered to serve against them in the field. They were trained initially in groups of sixty at a central depot, then went back to their original states for another month of training, and only thereafter reported for duty with the Security Forces.<sup>62</sup> In 1957 the force had ten platoons, each of one sergeant, two corporals, and twenty-one enlisted men, with a police officer as platoon leader. They apparently acted chiefly as guides, as first-echelon PW interrogators, and as decoys, simulating the presence and activity of communist guerrillas so as to draw reactions from the communist organization.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup>Ibid., March 13, April 3, July 25, 1953.

<sup>63</sup>Report on 1948-1957, p. 21. For more details on the use of the Special Operational Volunteer Force see a forthcoming study by R. Sunderland, Antiguerrilla Intelligence in Malaya, 1948-1960(U), The RAND Corporation, RM-4172-ISA, September 1964, SECRET.

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### VI. THE POLICE AND THE ARMY IN MALAYA

Looking back on the period 1948-1957, the Director of Operations in Malaya reported that the great majority of contacts resulting in the elimination of terrorists had been brought about by "Special Branch," that is to say, by the police intelligence system.<sup>64</sup>

This terse sentence on the role of the police in army operations in Malaya fails to convey the fact that Special Branch was not always so effective; when the Emergency began, intelligence on the communist terrorists was very bad. Looking at the orders he received for a major operation in December 1948, the commander of the 1st Battalion of the 2d King Edward VII's Own Gurkha Rifles observed that there was no information about anything in the area apart from the knowledge that there were "a few needles in the haystack," and the Gurkhas merely rummaged in the haystack in the hope of thereby provoking some reaction from the terrorists.<sup>65</sup> By 1957, Special Branch had a dossier on almost every guerrilla.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup>Report on 1948-1957, p. 27.

<sup>65</sup>"A Report on Operation SICKLE," Appendix C to "Quarterly Historical Report," 1/2 Gurkha Rifles, December 31, 1948, SECRET.

<sup>66</sup>Report on 1948-1957, p. 27.

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In great part, the difference reflects the intervening creation of a police force.

### BUILDING A POLICE FORCE

In 1948 the police in Malaya were some 2,000 under their authorized establishment of 12,000. They badly lacked Chinese members and Chinese linguists. Special Branch and the Criminal Investigation Department were undermanned and not organized to deal with communist subversion.<sup>67</sup> There were no police stations among the 500,000 Chinese squatters, who formed the principal support of the communist guerrillas.

The first step in 1948 was to recruit, both to bring the regular force up to establishment and to create a force of Special Constables for point defense. By December 31, several thousand regular police had been added, and there were 30,000 Specials. In 1949 police jungle squads were hastily organized, so that the 17th Gurkha Division could be freed to fight any full-scale attack from the north. At year's end, these squads numbered 253, each roughly equal to a platoon of infantry.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>68</sup>Federation Report, 1949, p. 203; Briggs Report, p. 29; interview with Gen. Perowne.

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They attained excellent combat efficiency; in 1955, for example, their kill/contact ratio was 0.65, as against the 0.82 average for all infantry battalions in Malaya, and the 0.65 of the Malay battalions alone.<sup>69</sup>

By the end of 1951, the police had 26,154 regulars, 99,000 part time volunteer auxiliaries, and 39,870 Special Constables.<sup>70</sup> The problem now was to mold this large group into an efficient professional force. To reshape police and intelligence, respectively, the then Director of Operations, General Sir Gerald W. R. Templer, brought in Colonel Arthur Young, who had been Commissioner of Police for the City of London, and Mr. J. H. Morton, who had made a career in intelligence in the Middle and Far East. Young's work, not immediately relevant to this study, took the line of cutting numbers, building quality through training, improving administration and working conditions, and changing the typical policeman from an armed constabulary into the friendly, knowledgeable patrolman of the Commonwealth.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup>Director's Annual Report, 1955, p. 16.

<sup>70</sup>Federation Report, 1951, p. 211.

<sup>71</sup>Interviews with Col. Arthur Young, London, 1962.

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Morton, though he could not give orders to police or military, reported directly to Templer, and whoever refused his suggestions had to justify the objection to Templer. With approval and concrete support, Morton took the line that intelligence began with a positive political theme (which he later called "Greater Malaysia") and aimed at nothing less than the penetration of the command structure of the enemy. Using the political theme to recruit agents and as a background to interrogation, he went to work. Prerequisite to this work was the resettlement that brought the squatters and estate workers within the sphere of government. And in the jungle, the government began to win over the aborigines.

Morton proceeded to build an interrogation center staffed with ex-Communists, and supported by teams of other renegades, who knew the handwriting of their ex-comrades, who could interpret documents, and who processed information and did all the myriad tasks attendant upon coordinating, and then intelligibly presenting, a mass of detail so that it formed a coherent picture. Underlying this organization and its techniques was the idea of converting the Communist to building a better society in Malaya instead of wasting his young manhood in the

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jungle.<sup>72</sup> Ultimately, Special Branch became so skilled, its mastery of communist psychology so great, that it could capture a communist courier, convert him, and put him back on his route, appropriately closer to his destination, with no terrorist the wiser.<sup>73</sup>

Meanwhile, protected in their new villages and seeing signs of progress and power all about them, the people grew steadily bolder in their defiance of the terrorists and more cooperative toward the government. The improvement was vivid. In June 1951, the diary of the 1st Battalion of the 7th Gurkha Rifle Regiment recorded from all sources only two intelligence items; in October 1952, there were 65. The improvement in the quality of the information was equally striking: between July and December 1959, in Perak State, twenty-five weekly Special Branch ISUMs (Intelligence Summaries) reported sightings -- giving times and places -- of a total of fifty-six guerrillas, of whom twenty-six were identified by name. The ISUMs also had seventeen general reports on local

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<sup>72</sup>Interviews with Mr. J. H. Morton, London, 1962 (The author did not ask Morton to define "Greater Malaysia"; it would seem doubtful that the government was prepared at that time to offer a detailed blueprint for a Greater Malaysia.)

<sup>73</sup>idem.

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guerrilla activity, and fifteen reports of ground evidence, such as footprints, bivouacs, and the like.<sup>74</sup> This degree of precision was a far cry from the days when the intelligence section of a brigade operations order could say only that communist gangs were believed to be in a certain area. A 1959 operations order of the 28th Commonwealth Brigade in its intelligence annex named the guerrillas who were the targets of the exercise, and gave their unit assignments and the unit boundaries.

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<sup>74</sup>"War Diary," 1/7 Gurkha Rifles, SECRET; Perak Special Branch Weekly ISUMs, Annex C to "Commander's Diary," 28 Commonwealth Brigade, SECRET.

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### VII. THE COMMUNIST ENEMY

Until the mass of documents captured in the mass communist surrenders of 1957-1958 and the results of the interrogations of ex-Communists become available, any estimate of the Communists' strength, doctrine, and intentions can be only tentative. Yet the following sketch of the communist armed forces in Malaya will illuminate the problem faced by the armed forces of the Commonwealth.

In the last year of World War II, the integrated Anglo-American theater command for Southeast Asia, preparing to take Malaya from the Japanese, established contact with communist guerrillas who had emerged in Malaya. Instructors and technicians, organized as "Force 136," and arms were dropped to them in the hope that, when SEAC's divisions went ashore, the guerrillas would interfere with Japanese troop movements. When the war ended, some 5,800 guerrillas were paid off and demobilized, but an estimated 4,700 stayed in the jungle, organized, uniformed, and training for the day of rebellion.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>75</sup>Vice-Admiral the Earl Mountbatten of Burma, KG, Report to the Combined Chiefs of Staff by the Supreme Allied Commander, Southeast Asia, 1943-1945, pp. 155, 183; FARELF Intelligence Review, June 1946, SECRET.

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### STRENGTH AND COMPOSITION

These guerrillas, and the Malayan Races Liberation Army (MRLA) into which they later evolved, were about 95 per cent Chinese, thus reflecting the composition of the Malayan Communist Party. In social origin, some 70 per cent were laborers and squatters, who formed the rank and file and filled some of the lower executive posts. Thirty per cent, including the leadership, came from the educated classes, being largely students and professionals. As of October 1950, British intelligence services believed that some 60 per cent of the old wartime guerrillas were with the MRLA and that most of the organization's officers came from that source.

In 1948 there had been approximately 12,000 guerrillas. By the fall of 1950, the time of the British estimate, about 2,840 of them had been killed in the field or captured or had surrendered, and an estimated 540 had died of wounds or disease.<sup>76</sup> In later years,

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<sup>76</sup>"Precis of the Basic Paper on the Malayan Communist Party," British War Office, Military Intelligence Files, October 1950 (hereafter, "Basic Paper"). SECRET, Federation Report for relevant years; BORS/FE, Memo No. 6/53, pp. 2-3, and No. 9/54, p. 12, SECRET. Even in these early days, recruiting could not make up for losses; thus, a Malayan estimate puts the guerrillas' strength in 1951 at about eight thousand (Combined Intelligence Staff, May 10, 1955, MAC 1282517, SECRET)

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Special Branch, which was responsible for intelligence on the guerrillas, gave the following estimate of the strength of the guerrilla armed forces as of the first of each year:

Fig. 7

**ESTIMATED GUERRILLA STRENGTH, 1951-1957<sup>77</sup>**

Year (Jan. 1)	No. of armed guerrillas
1951	7,292
1952	5,765
1953	4,373
1954	3,402
1955	2,798
1956	2,231
1957	2,063

**WEAPONS**

The types of weapons that the guerrillas had are suggested by what was captured from them up to June 30, 1952:

<sup>77</sup>Director of Operations, Annual Review, 1956, SECRET.

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Fig. 8

## TERRORIST EQUIPMENT CAPTURED IN FIRST FOUR YEARS OF EMERGENCY<sup>78</sup>

Arms and Ammunition	No. Captured
Light machine guns and light automatic weapons	529
Rifles and pistols	5,179
Smooth-bore guns	603
Live rounds of ammunition	811,942
Grenades, shells, bombs, and mines	3,531

These stores, added to what one may assume was in the hands of the 5,765 guerrillas still at large in 1952, suggest that they had had almost enough to arm a force equivalent to three Japanese regiments of World War II. The rifle strength of the Japanese infantry regiment was 3,800.<sup>79</sup>

The absence of trench mortars and light artillery from the list of captured weapons is interesting. In the course of the Emergency, a few trench mortars and a 20mm cannon or two were captured from the Communists but these were exceptional events.

<sup>78</sup>Federation of Malaya, "Weekly News Summary," September 2, 1952, and January 2, 1953.

<sup>79</sup>Japanese Order of Battle, a G-2 (USA) handbook, 1945; TM (Technical Manual) 30-480, October 1, 1944.

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About 72 per cent of the weapons taken from the guerrillas were British-made, and the balance U.S., Belgian, Dutch, and Japanese, with a few exotic pieces. This was desirable for the guerrillas, who sought to obtain their ammunition supplies through capture from the Security Forces. Had they been armed primarily with American weapons, for example, this would have been impossible, and their ammunition would have had to come from thousands of miles away.

The guerrillas had weapons in plenty from the 1941-1942 campaign and the period of the Japanese occupation; in the 1948-1950 period, about one-fifth of those recaptured were thought to be from airdrops to Force 136. If this assumption was correct, it would suggest that the Communists, at peak, may have had stocks for 30,000 men. The effectiveness of these stocks was bound to be diminished, as time passed on, by problems of maintenance in the Malayan climate. By January 1951, communist weapons were said to be badly maintained, and ammunition was in short supply. There was no sign of outside aid. These were the weapons of one communist platoon, believed to be a representative sample of terrorist equipment:

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- 11 rifles, each with 27 rounds  
(presumably the Enfield .303)
- 4 French rifles with 20 rounds  
each
- 1 Sten gun with 80 rounds
- 2 Siamese Mausers with 30 rounds  
each
- 2 miscellaneous rifles, with 15  
rounds each
- 3 shotguns, with 12 rounds each
- 1 .32 cal. automatic pistol
- 2 grenades<sup>80</sup>

### UNIFORM AND TRAINING

The majority of MRLA members wore uniforms, which varied somewhat within the company because of supply problems. Long trousers and puttees, however, apparently were mandatory. The uniforms were jungle green or khaki, and in some cases, for reasons never explained, black. In well-organized units, women tailored the uniforms. The five-pointed cap with five-pointed red or yellow star was standard. Varying arrangements of colored stars were the badges of rank.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>80</sup>"Basic Paper"; "Basic Information on the Malayan Communist Party," British War Office, Military Intelligence Files, 1950 (hereafter, "Basic Information"), p. 16, SECRET; "Notes on the Forces of the Malayan Communist Party," War Office, MI Files, 1951 (hereafter, "Notes"), pp. 31-32, SECRET; JORS/FE, Memo No. 6/53, p. 3, SECRET.

<sup>81</sup>"Basic Paper."

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In the early years, the individual communist guerrillas were well prepared. Their program began with physical training, the manual of arms, and close-order drill, and then progressed to jungle and guerrilla techniques, with instruction in day and night patrols, ambushes, sabotage, arson, etc. Particular emphasis was placed on the importance of guards and sentries. Practical training was tied in locally with the defense of the training centers through extensive perimeter patrols. The hours were long and discipline was strict. The training centers found by the Security Forces sometimes provided accommodation for up to three hundred, with parade grounds, assault courses, and rifle ranges. One even had running water in bamboo pipes.<sup>82</sup> The guerrillas had had British instructors during World War II, and their opponents in the Emergency believed that they were using such British techniques of jungle war as immediate-action drills.

### ORGANIZATION

The organization of the communist armed forces stayed the same throughout the Emergency. It was a pyramid, at

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<sup>82</sup>"Notes," pp. 22, 29.

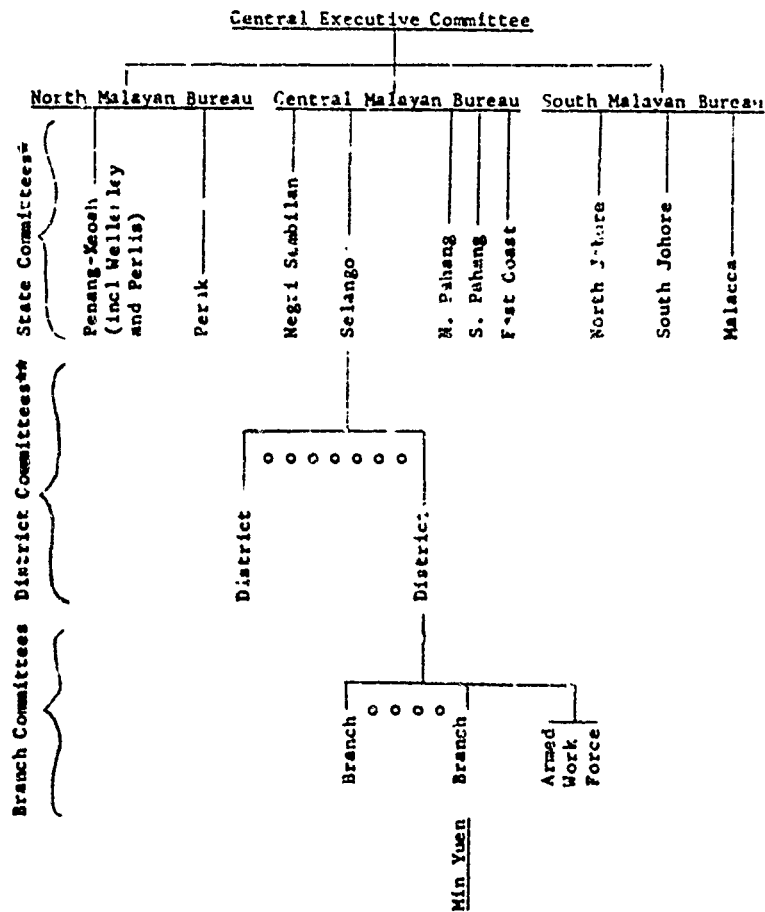
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Fig. 9

COMMUNIST ORGANIZATION IN MALAYA



\*State Committees were also the command of as many guerrilla regiments.

\*\* The 50-odd District Committees were also the command of guerrilla companies or independent platoons.

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whose peak was the Central Executive Committee of the Malayan Communist Party, which doubled as the high command of the armed forces. Directly below this group were three regional bureaus, for the north, center, and south of Malaya. Each bureau, in turn, controlled a group of what were called state committees; two of the larger states, Johore and Pahang, were divided into a northern and a southern half, with a state-level committee in charge of each.

As a rule, a state committee also provided the command and staff of a guerrilla regiment. By 1950, ten of these guerrilla regiments had been activated. They might be compared to as many task-force headquarters, for there was no uniformity in the number of companies and independent platoons under each. Battalions were never formed. Perhaps, under Malayan conditions, a loosely-jointed company of several platoons was the most that any one area could hide and feed.<sup>83</sup>

The close integration of the military and political leadership should be noted: the same men were both party leaders and officers of the guerrilla armed forces.

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<sup>83</sup>"Review of 1949, 1 July - 31 December 1949," War Office, MI Files, p. 8, SECRET.

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There were about fifty Communist Party districts, and each had its committee. These committees worked with the company or independent platoon as the state committee worked with the regiment. The next and lowest level was the branch committee, of which there were about four to a district. These, with the district committees had the mission of logistical support. From 1950 on, the Security Forces consciously aimed at disrupting guerrilla logistics. The guerrillas in turn, like all armed forces, had to keep their logistics functioning, and their organizational concepts and devices will be outlined presently.<sup>84</sup>

The Communists had no radio, and so had to rely on couriers, with all that this implied of time lag and slow reaction. To compensate for this disadvantage, they chose the highly decentralized structure here described. Bureau members served as chairmen of state committees, state committeemen as chairmen of district committees, and so on down. These men had complete freedom within their allotted spheres. But because these spheres were

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<sup>84</sup>The over-all problem of logistics is discussed in R. Sunderland, Resettlement and Food Control in Malaya(U), The RAND Corporation, RA-4173-ISA, September 1964, SECRET.

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carefully defined, the British, once they were familiar with this control system, learned to exploit it: they would mount operations that involved many different communist units, thereby forcing upon the communist commanders the painfully slow task of coordinating their actions and obtaining the necessary concurrences from a number of headquarters, a process that could proceed no faster than at the pace of the slowest courier.<sup>85</sup>

The terrorists never changed their organizational structure. As one area after another was freed of Communists, the remainder had to work within the framework of directives from higher up, but with the handicap that the British, by cutting a belt of cleared areas right across the Malayan peninsula, had also cut the north-south courier routes. The sense of isolation and accelerating disaster thus forced on the Communists to the south showed itself in the later mass surrenders.

In the early years of the Emergency, the Security Forces believed the Communists capable of moving forces numbering in the low hundreds from one state to another.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup>Interview with Gen. Brooke; Joint Advisory Intelligence Committee, "The Potential of the Malayan Communist Party," War Office, MI Files, October 1950, SECRET.

<sup>86</sup>"Review of 1949, 1 January - 30 June 1949," War Office, MI Files, p. 10, SECRET.

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Given the inadequacy of tactical intelligence at that time, this may not have been an entirely accurate estimate. Certainly, once resettlement and food control had gone into effect, such large moves would have been logistically difficult. In the later years, therefore, a guerrilla area was likely to be expected to support its own assigned forces. Stockpiling rice in preparation for a marked influx of guerrillas from other areas would have been a problem, and the growing jungle skill of the Security Forces made large movements hazardous.

### LOCAL STRENGTH

The number of men the Communists could gather together at any one time during their most powerful years can only be estimated. The above reference to training camps with physical facilities for three hundred suggests only that the Communists must have contemplated massing groups of that size; whether three hundred were ever actually present at one time is unknown. Contact reports are thus far the only source on which to base estimates, and these are not fully reliable. For the soldier in combat is too busy to make a good estimate, and his accounts afterward, at any level of command, tend to exaggerate the size of the enemy force. (Thus, it was

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years before it was established that, contrary to contemporary impressions, the number of tanks that the Germans had in France and Belgium in May 1940 was no greater than that of the defenders.) With that caution one may consider the fact that on March 25, 1950, in Malantan, the guerrillas inflicted the as yet highest number of casualties since the Emergency began, by ambushing a twenty-five-man platoon of the 3d Battalion of the Malay Regiment, along with sixteen Special Constables attached to it. After a four-hour fight, the survivors surrendered, and were decently treated. The platoon leader, a police guide, and sixteen enlisted men were killed in action. Fifteen guerrillas were reported as killed.<sup>87</sup> The fact that the fight lasted a full four hours, until the platoon ran out of ammunition, suggests that the ambush party, which had the advantages of position and surprise, was little or no larger than the reinforced platoon.

Early in the same year, an estimated 100 guerrillas attacked a village near Batu Pahat burned buildings,

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<sup>87</sup>"Quarterly Historical Report," FARELF, G(Ops/SD) Branch, for the period ending March 31, 1950, SECRET.

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looted shops, and ambushed the relieving police force, of which they killed two and wounded three. And an estimated 150 guerrillas attacked the isolated village of Bukit Kepong in the Muar area, killed eighteen police and four civilians, and burned the police buildings. Nearby village guards tried a diversion, but without success.<sup>88</sup> The estimates of the size of the guerrilla parties seem reasonable. Given poor security, a gap in the fire plan, or a shortage of ammunition in the village, 150 resolute men who had carefully rehearsed the action could well hope to overrun a wired-in, defended police post with two or three machine-gun emplacements and fifteen to twenty defenders. Not unlikely, in such case, the post was reconnoitered by the local guerrillas, who judged it a profitable target. They then sold the plan to higher authority, who agreed to send parties from neighboring areas that would carry their own rice and bullets. All concerned might have rehearsed the plan at their home stations, and once or twice after massing, before striking successfully and dispersing.

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

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But such successes were few. That in Kelantan was the only such incident in the state for the first quarter of 1950, a period when the guerrillas were at their highest combat efficiency, and resettlement, food control, improved tactics, and the system of war executive committees had not yet sapped their strength. Three years later, the Security Forces reported that contacts with guerrilla parties of more than ten members had fallen from thirty-seven in the last quarter of 1952 to seventeen in the first quarter of 1953.<sup>89</sup>

### LOGISTICAL PROBLEMS

Guerrillas must eat, and eat enough to support a strenuous life. In the tropics, where mosquitoes and microbes abound and malaria, wounds, and contamination of food and water offer real problems, they must also have preventive medicine. From February 21 to June 4, 1944, for example, the 2,832 infantrymen of Merrill's Marauders, who were fighting in the North Burma jungle, had to evacuate 948 men as casualties of amoebic dysentery (503),

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<sup>89</sup>BORS/FE, Memo No. 6/53, p. 2, SECRET.

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scrub typhus (149), and malaria (296).<sup>90</sup> All these diseases are present in Malaya. Scrub typhus kills quickly if not treated with the proper antibiotic; the others incapacitate the victim and often are fatal. Keeping them in check requires two things: discipline and drugs. The soldier must take malaria suppressives, must be meticulously careful with food and water, and must get quick diagnosis and treatment for scrub typhus. An army can usually provide these things, but it is a critical problem for the guerrilla. Up to at least 1954, the Malayan guerrillas apparently succeeded in solving it, for a study conducted that year set deaths among them from disease at the level to be expected in Malaya among all Chinese males in their age group.<sup>91</sup> Their later experience, under conditions of steadily more effective interdiction of their supplies, is unknown.

A look at the organization of guerrilla logistics in Malaya suggests the presence, throughout the Emergency,

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<sup>90</sup>Charles F. Kromm and Riley Sunderland, Stilwell's Command Problems, Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, Washington, D.C., 1970, p. 210.

<sup>91</sup>BORS/FE, Memo No. 9/54, p. 12, SECRET.

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of three constant structural elements in the logistic effort: the uniformed armed fighters in the jungle; dual function combat/service elements operating a few miles to either side of the jungle's edge; and sympathizers among the people. To put it more succinctly, these were the guerrillas; their links with the people; and the people. The names that the Communists gave to their organizations among the latter two changed several times during the Emergency, but the functions remained the same.

When the Emergency began, supplying food, drugs, information, and recruits (that is, logistical support) to the guerrillas was the mission of the Min Chong Yuen Tong, or People's Movement. (In the literature, this group usually appears as Min Yuen.) Its members, including the leaders, did not belong to the Malayan Communist Party. They were active sympathizers, living at home and helping the terrorists when and as needed. Their link with the Party and its armed forces was through the lowest party echelon, the branch committee.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> ATOM, 1958, pp. xviii, II-7/8.

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The Communists at first apparently believed that the guerrillas and the Min Yuen between them could provide all the movement across the jungle's edge. In 1949 they admitted defeat in this. Given the fact that the Security Forces could operate effectively in the same terrain, logistical support for the guerrillas had become a job for specialists. By October 1950, according to British Intelligence, the Min Yuen had assumed exclusively the role of link, and its former function among the people had been taken over by the Self-Protection Corps. It was thought also that the pressures that had forced the Min Yuen into full-time operations across the jungle's edge were driving the Self-Protection Corps into the same role.<sup>93</sup>

In 1952 an estimate set the number of active, organized, working members of the guerrilla logistical structure at about 11,000, of whom 3,500 to 4,000 were armed. This force was over and above the number of those who were then in the jungle as members of guerrilla units.<sup>94</sup> The

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<sup>93</sup> FORS/FE, Memo No. 9/54, p. 13; ATOM, 1958, p. II-8.

<sup>94</sup> General Staff, Intelligence, Hq FARELF, "Notes on Malaya and the Emergency, 1949-1952," February 1, 1952 (hereafter, "Notes on Malaya"), pp. 11-12, SECRET.

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estimate of 11,000 guerrilla service troops may be compared with the 6,531 the British then had in the Federation for the same tasks.<sup>95</sup>

The guerrillas' helpers collected money and food by extortion and persuasion. The ratio of these two means might be regarded as a measure of popular support for the guerrilla. In the early days, food probably required virtually no extortion, and money not very much.

By any standards, the cash flow in the guerrillas' palmy days was impressive. One district committee of about fifty took in \$70,000 (US) in five months; at the same time, the Federation spent about \$70,000,000 a year fighting the Communists. Thus, one Communist Party district alone, of the fifty-odd in Malaya, collected about 1/500th the amount that the government was spending on the entire anticommunist effort.

The money for the guerrillas came partly from Malayan Communist Party subscriptions and contributions. The bulk of it, however, was thought to be extorted, especially from businessmen and shopkeepers in remote areas, but also from laborers and peasants. Those who

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<sup>95</sup>See Fig. 1, p. 25.

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refused first were warned and then, if they still refused, were abducted, robbed, or killed. Tin and rubber workers were in a position to steal very considerable amounts of raw material, to be disposed of through Party channels for Party profit. Party members controlled firms that obtained contracts at gunpoint.

The district committee managed Party finances. It kept a percentage for itself, paid the local guerrillas, and sent the rest on up to the state committee. The districts were not permitted to keep for themselves more than a set amount; an official estimate was that it cost them \$40 a month in Malayan currency to maintain one guerrilla.<sup>96</sup>

The same people in the organizations who collected money collected food and brought it to the jungle fringe. As the skill and sophistication of the Security Forces increased, as resettlement and food control complicated the task, the guerrillas' helpers had to improve their smuggling and security measures. Special Branch and the troops, however, more than kept pace with these refinements; the food dump was a favorite ambush site and the carrying party a frequent target.

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<sup>96</sup>"Notes on Malaya," p. 35; "Basic Paper". "Basic Information," p. 20.

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### GUERRILLA DOCTRINE

The doctrine of guerrilla war that the Malayan Races Liberation Army sought to apply was set forth in a variety of documents captured by the Commonwealth forces. British understanding of communist intent, however, did not have to wait on such lucky finds, for, as early as June 1948, the Commander-in-Chief of FARELF, General Sir Neil Ritchie, showed that he had studied the lessons of the communist efforts in Greece and China and had drawn useful conclusions.<sup>97</sup>

The communist concept was that guerrilla war unfolded in three phases. In the first, the guerrilla would gain control of selected areas by a blend of force, terror, and persuasion. In the second, the inhabitants of these areas would be coaxed and coerced into joining organized military units. And in the final phase, these units, trained and armed, would move out from the selected areas, which would serve them as firm bases. Ultimately, in Malaya, a union of many bases and units would produce an army able to conquer the country and set up a people's

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<sup>97</sup>Ci. "Ritchie Report," pp. 4-5.

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republic, as had been done in China, and as would be done in Vietnam.<sup>98</sup>

Looking at the problems involved in setting up such bases, the Communists distinguished between "guerrilla areas" and "guerrilla bases." The areas were sections of the country under communist control, with "comparatively strong" mass organizations, which formed in effect supply bases for warfare and also provided arms and manpower. A guerrilla base was defined as a "secure and stable rear line" in a guerrilla area. The communist paper setting forth these definitions observed that there were no stereotypes for setting up these areas and bases other than the rule that their creation was inseparable from the mass movement and that they had to be in rural areas. The cities were to be left largely to the government. Guerrilla areas were fundamental to the success of the cause, for without them the guerrilla units could not

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<sup>98</sup>A captured document dated December 1949, entitled "Supplementary Views of the Malayan War Strategy," refers to the three-phase strategy and states that, as of that date, the Communists had not succeeded in completing Phase I ("Review of 1950, 1 January - 30 June," p. 2, SECRET); the strategy itself is tersely described by Gen. Ritchie in the Minutes of the Commander-in-Chief's Conference, GHQ FARELF, September 21-22, 1948, SECRET.

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grow into a regular army. This communist directive also called the Chinese squatters the foundation of the guerrilla areas.

The tactics to be followed were succinctly described. British lines of communication were to be a major target, and the Security Forces compelled to disperse their strength. Attacks, carefully planned, would aim at weak posts and units. The guerrillas would use sabotage, and seize arms and ammunition whenever possible.<sup>99</sup>

Whatever may have been the reason, the Communists' attacks on British lines of communication remained, in the opinion of the defenders, far below their capabilities. The weakness in the communist tactics lay in the fact that attacks were seldom pressed home. To gauge the strength of one's opponent in relatively brief combat is difficult. Often, therefore, if a police post resisted stoutly, or if an ambushed patrol reacted with a vigorous antiambush drill and well-aimed fire, the guerrillas concluded that they faced a strong opponent and withdrew.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>99</sup>Hq Malaya District, "Weekly Intelligence Review" No. 7, December 16, 1948. SECRET.

<sup>100</sup>ROPS/FE, Memo No. 1/57, p. 15, CONFIDENTIAL.

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Early in 1949 the Communists tried to set up base areas, but the attempt was compromised at least in part by the Security Forces' capture of the plan. They sought to set up four bases in Malaya and one across the border in Thailand. But the Security Forces in Malaya reacted vigorously and kept the Communists continually on the move by having battalions cross and recross the projected base areas. This probably was the reason that the communist plan did not succeed.<sup>101</sup>

In the effort to establish the bases, the Communists drew their uniformed armed forces into the jungle. This left their district committees temporarily without units capable of continuing guerrilla operations. They solved this problem with the creation of the "Armed Work Forces." Initially, as set up in June 1949, these were usually one platoon -- three sections of ten men each -- to a district. They had some light weapons and had received paramilitary training. Their personnel was drawn from the Min Yuen and could be rotated. Unlike the Min Yuen, the Armed Work

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<sup>101</sup>"Quarterly Historical Report," FARELF, G(Op.), for the quarter ending June 30, 1949, SECRET; "Quarterly Historical Report," FARELF, G(Ops/SD) Branch, June 30, 1949, SECRET; "Notes," pp. 31-32.

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Forces lived in camps. The sections might combine to operate as a platoon, and they also joined with the regular guerrilla units for more ambitious operations. In January 1951 it was thought that they numbered between 1,000 and 1,500.<sup>102</sup>

A British analysis of reports on guerrilla camps for the first five years of the Emergency, not including the relatively few bases in the deep jungle, suggests that the Communists were following certain principles in choosing sites for their camps. The resulting pattern, in turn, facilitated the discovery of the camps. Ninety-eight per cent of them were within two miles either of habitations or of gardens cultivated by the guerrillas themselves. They were likely to be within 50 to 100 yards of a stream large enough to be shown on a map scaled to 1/63360. Almost all were between 150 and 250 feet above sea level; the favorite location was on the spur of a mountain, which offered escape routes. The camps were clustered, with up to four or five in two or three adjoining grid squares, though they had been built at different times. Thus, if the Security Forces found one camp, they could assume the presence of others nearby. Individual

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<sup>102</sup>"Notes," p. 18.

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camps often were under outstandingly tall and bushy-topped trees. About 70 per cent of the camps were so placed as to catch the morning sun.<sup>103</sup>

In posting sentries, the Communists were usually careful to safeguard the tracks leading to their camps. The track from the water supply to the camp was an obvious avenue of approach (the Security Forces could be expected to move along the stream and then to cut in where they found evidence that water had been carried) and therefore was often the first point to have a sentry post. To keep a post manned by alert, watchful sentries around the clock requires an over-all strength of ten men. The smaller the guerrilla party, therefore, the less likely was it to be able to post adequate security.<sup>104</sup>

### A MAJOR COMMUNIST DECISION

The ability of the Commonwealth forces to operate in the jungle, the refusal of British authority to accept stalemate or defeat, the toughness of the planters and tin miners who stood to their posts, and a feeling on the part of communist leadership that tactics of terror were

<sup>103</sup>BORS/FE, Memo No. 3/53, pp. 1-8, SECRET.

<sup>104</sup>Ibid., p. 10.

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alienating the people on whom they depended for support led to a major communist decision in October 1951. It was to refrain from attacks on the Malayan economy (the rubber trees, tin mines, bridges, and railroads) and against the resettled villages, and to abandon terror, such as tossing grenades into crowds and burning churches and ambulances. As the following table suggests, this directive did not rule out the staged incident whereby the guerrillas attempted to make their presence felt; rather, it meant that there would be no planned, vigorous attack on any part of the economy nor on any section of society. It was a retreat from organized terror into subversion, with an occasional act to lend weight to what the Communists were saying. This retreat greatly simplified the task of the military, for subversion fell into the sphere of the police.

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Fig. 10

## GUERRILLA INCIDENTS, JANUARY-MARCH 1954\*

Type of incident	Monthly average
Against Security Forces	
Motor transport	8.7
Foot patrols	24.7
Police stations	--
Static posts	12.7
Individuals and miscellaneous	3.7
Against civilians	
In towns and villages	4.0
On roads	3.0
In estates and mines	6.0
Major casualties (miscellaneous)	3.3
Minor casualties (miscellaneous)	1.0
Against civilian property	
In new villages	0.7
In estates and mines	9.3
On railways	2.0
Posts and telegraphs	14.0
Cars and trucks	1.3
Armed robbery	6.0
Degree of seriousness	Per cent
Involving preplanning, risk, and either death or damage of more than \$333	5.7
Involving risk and preplanning, but no death and less than \$333 damage	21.9
Involving no risk or aggressiveness, but causing death or more than \$333 damage	8.4
Involving no risk, aggressiveness, or death, nor more than \$333 damage	64.0
	<u>100.0</u>

\*BORS/FE, Memo No. 9/54, SECRET.

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Making terror unprofitable for the Communists and compelling them to return to subversive tactics was the Security Forces' second victory in Malaya. The first had been their ability to keep the guerrillas from establishing bases in which they could form regular units that might have enabled the Communists to pass from terror to open war. The task of defending sensitive installations was greatly simplified for the government forces by the communist decision, in 1951, to leave these installations alone,<sup>105</sup> which freed resources for the Security Forces' remaining task of eliminating the guerrillas from the jungle.

Despite the guerrillas' patent difficulties, and although they and their supporters were about 95 per cent Chinese, no aid seems to have come to them from the Chinese Communists to the north. On January 16, 1949, the General Officer Commanding, Singapore District, stated flatly that there had been no arms-smuggling, a belief that the British maintained throughout the Emergency. One might argue, of course, that it was not a shortage of arms but inability to solve the series of problems created

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<sup>105</sup>The Security Forces captured the directive in 1952. Gene Z. Hanrahan, The Communist Struggle in Malaya, Institute of Pacific Relations, New York, 1954, pp. 130-131.

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by food denial which finally broke the guerrillas, and that it would not have been possible to bring rice in bulk from China to Malaya without a major military operation, which would have created another set of problems for the Communists.<sup>106</sup>

### A POSSIBLE PARALLEL

As one examines the jungle and combat skills of the communist guerrillas in Malaya, as well as the techniques and the kind of units that were most effective against them, one notes a consistent pattern: when combat soldiers in the field were seeking contact with the guerrilla, or when they met him in action, the most successful among them were those who had the mentality

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<sup>106</sup>"Minutes of the Commanders' Conference Held at Johore Sub-District on 12 January 1949," SECRET; "Review of 1950, 1 January - 30 June," p. 9; Joint Intelligence Committee, Far East, "Communism in Far East as at 31 March 1950," War Office, MI Files, p. 15, SECRET. Paul M. A. Linebarger, who was interviewed by the author in Washington, D.C., in 1962, had studied the question in Malaya for FARELF and found no sign there of Chinese Communist support. He mentioned having been reliably informed that, had the Chinese Communists intervened in Malaya, the British government would have supplied amphibious craft, fighter cover, and air support for a Chinese Nationalist return to the mainland, and that the Peking government was so told.

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and used the techniques of the hunter, a reflection of their appraisal of the enemy.<sup>107</sup>

In many respects the guerrillas did indeed resemble big game. Their senses of hearing and smell became abnormally sharp in the jungle. They claimed that they could tell a Gurkha unit from an Australian by the tobacco that each smoked. A broken bush or the faintest rattle of equipment would warn them of an ambush, and they would spring to cover at the first alarming sign. There they could lie for hours without moving, while Security Forces, if unaccompanied by trackers or properly handled dogs, thrashed about looking for them in vain. They saw time in a way very different from that of the impatient Westerner.

Hence, also, the most successful methods against them were those appropriate for catching game: silence, patience, stealth, study of their habits, and watching their feeding spots. Staking out a kid for a tiger and ambushing a food dump for guerrillas are handled in the same way. In each case the hunter takes his position.

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<sup>107</sup>The parallel with hunting is drawn by an anonymous British soldier in "Y Company Notes," The Royal Hampshire Regiment Journal, November 1956, and by Henniker, p. 16.

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with the utmost quiet and stealth, exploits an attractive bait, and waits patiently for the game to appear. In the many cases that the game does not appear, the patient and experienced hunter tracks it by finding its spoor (for he knows it does not vanish into thin air), chooses a better spot, and lays another ambush.

### AN APPRAISAL OF THE CAMPAIGN

In 1957 the Director of Operations and his staff issued a report on the campaign to that date. In it, they appraised what the communist adversary had succeeded in doing. The guerrillas, they reported, had contained a force (excluding police on normal watch and ward and the Home Guard) which varied between five and twelve times their own strength. For the first five years, the Communists had kept the number of incidents, that is to say, of attacks of any sort on persons or property, above one hundred a month; thereafter, the number had fallen off. In nine years' time, the Communists had killed 7, and wounded or abducted 8, of every 10,000 people in Malaya.<sup>108</sup> (A perspective on the killing of civilians is

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<sup>108</sup> Report on 1948-1957, p. 7. The Chinese element of the Home Guard had been formed for political, not military, ends (which is the reason that it was excluded from strength totals in official analyses). The Chinese

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provided by the fact that, in 1952, auto accidents killed 583 people in Malaya, and the guerrillas, 343.)<sup>109</sup>

As indicated, effective operation in the jungle and the jungle fringe required an understanding of the principles of guerrilla warfare and much hard-won experience. When the Emergency began, the eleven Commonwealth battalions then in Malaya were able to place powerful task forces in the jungle and keep them there; within a few months, all eleven were rated as both battle- and jungleworthy. However, as the skill of the soldiers and police improved, so did that of the guerrillas, for the inefficient died and the doubtful surrendered. Yet, in every phase of the jungle war, the Security Forces forced the pace, and ultimately there was no doubt that they were masters of the jungle. This meant that they had perfected the routine use of air supply; appropriate deployment; knowledge of what kinds of operations were the most

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had been conscripted into guard units to commit the Chinese community in Malaya to the government side. The authorities believed that the Chinese would cooperate with the government if ordered to do so, whereas persuasion, in the context of 1950-1951, would have been futile. Giving the Chinese villager a gun and a uniform was thought to be a long step toward getting him to identify himself with the government and to support it with information while denying food, information, and money to the guerrilla. (Briggs Report, pp. 2, 13, 25.)

<sup>109</sup>From the Files of Col. Arthur Young; Federation Report, 1952.

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effective; the use of food denial as a weapon; and the ability to move silently through the jungle, to stay there for weeks on end, to patrol effectively, to exploit artillery and air support, and to gather combat intelligence.

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PART 2

THE ARMY AT WORK

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### I. AIR SUPPLY

The one point on which the commanders of communist and Commonwealth forces found themselves agreed was the fundamental importance of air supply in jungle operations. Looking back on the first year of the Emergency, the Commander-in-Chief, Far Eastern Land Forces, General Ritchie, stated that the majority of jungle operations would have been impossible without it; it gave his forces a great advantage over the guerrillas, because the latter had to leave the jungle to obtain supplies whereas the troops could stay there indefinitely. Captured communist documents commenting on the same period confirmed the value of air supply to the government forces. Indeed, in the eyes of all those who fought in Malaya, the importance of air supply never diminished. As late as 1958, battalion commander Lt. Col. Richard Miers called it "a priceless asset."<sup>1</sup>

By "air supply" is meant the routine delivery, by air, of food, ammunition, drugs, and clothing to tactical

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<sup>1</sup>Lt. Gen. Sir Neil M. Ritchie, KC\*, KBE, DSO, MC, ADC, Commander-in-Chief FARELF, "Report on Operations in Malaya, June 1948 to July 1949," GHQ Singapore, September 6, 1949 (hereafter, "Ritchie Report"), p. 17. "Quarterly Historical Report," FARELF, G(Ops/SD) Branch, September 30, 1949, SECRET; Brig. Richard Miers, Shoot To Kill, Faber and Faber, London, 1959, p. 77.

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units. Units supplied by ground transport must protect their flanks. They can do this in a variety of ways: by keeping in touch with other units to their right and left; by constant patrolling and air reconnaissance; and by assigning part of their strength to dealing with any attempt by the enemy to envelop them and place his forces across the routes by which vehicles bring up supplies from the rear. Most transport in most armies moves on wheels, and hence by road, so that an enemy, by placing blocks on a few roads, can cut off the flow of supplies.

For the road-supplied unit that operates in the jungle, this problem is especially serious. Vegetation there so limits visibility that it is difficult to see hostile elements passing through it. Moreover, Asian and African forces have proved themselves highly skilled in moving through rough country in considerable numbers unseen by European and American opponents. (In 1879, for example, at Isandhlwana, South Africa, a large camp of Europeans and natives was surprised and completely overrun by a force of Zulus several times their number.) Therefore, a unit that is supplied in the jungle by the means normal in Western armies -- trucks moving along roads --

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becomes very vulnerable, for its enemies can move around and past it undetected with relative ease, and then place blocks across supply routes or ambush major units moving along roads in motor transport.

The answer to this problem is air supply. A unit on air supply need not be so concerned about its flanks and is able on short notice to shift its manpower in response to the needs of the moment. It has the mobility of a ship at sea, for it can change course and move off in any desired direction without being bound to a road. Moreover, if its side has air superiority so that its enemy cannot, in turn, use air supply, such a unit can easily outflank its opponent and block his supply lines.

### LIMITATIONS OF AIR SUPPLY

Air supply has limitations. It is sensitive to weather, antiaircraft, shelling of the drop zone or landing strip, and fighter interception. These hazards increase with the distance within enemy-held terrain that the aircraft has to traverse.

Many of the officers conducting operations in Malaya had only recently experienced the limitations as well as the advantages of air supply. Thus, between March 5 and 11, 1944, 9,250 British, Gurkha, and African soldiers

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("Chindits") were dropped deep into Burma, about 100 miles behind the Japanese lines, to block the enemy's lines of communication. They had light artillery, and were to build strongholds along these LOCs that would include landing strips for fighters and transports. The Japanese, though busy with an attempted invasion of India, nevertheless found a division to use against the Allied troops, and there was bitter fighting around the strongholds. In the end, the monsoon rains, which curtailed air supply and wore down troops, the Japanese attacks, the death of the Chindit commander in an air crash, and some of the blunders that so often happen in war were beyond any compensatory virtues of air supply. It became impossible to bring in a relief column, and the Chindits, who originally had included the rifle strength of two divisions, had to fight their way out, sick, starving, and substantially spent. The parallel with Dien Bien Phu is instructive.

To the south, along the Arakan Coast of Burma, on the other hand, air supply showed itself a sovereign factor when properly used. There, the British had the 5th and 7th Indian divisions in line, with their right flank resting on the coast. On February 4, 5, and 6,

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1944, the Japanese 55th Division infiltrated these lines along the coastal range, cutting not only behind but between the two Indian divisions from the rear -- a feat of junglecraft and marching -- and overran the division headquarters of the 7th. In two similar previous situations, in 1942 and 1943, British and Indian troops had abandoned transport and artillery and fought their way back, past the Japanese blocks, at heavy cost. In 1944, applying the lesson learned from the earlier experience, the two divisions formed perimeter defenses and went on air supply, while the rest of the corps, the 26th and 36th Indian divisions, drove toward them. The Japanese enveloping forces found themselves between hammer and anvil. Their food and ammunition were limited to what they had with them, for one division could not keep open the jungle trails against two divisions pressing out and two more pressing in. In two weeks, the 7th Indian Division had reopened a ground link with its service elements and seized the initiative. The Japanese 55th Division was roughly handled, though skillful and fortunate enough to extricate itself.

A few months later, the story was repeated on a grand scale on the Imphal Plain at the Indo-Burmese border.

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With three divisions, the Japanese isolated IV Corps, which promptly went on air supply, while another corps, driving in from the railhead, took measures to reopen a ground LOC. The Japanese maintained their blocking positions and made their attacks with sacrificial valor, but they could not keep open their ground LOCs under pressure from air attack and ground envelopments and in the face of the monsoon rains. In July two of the three Japanese divisions disintegrated, and there was that rare spectacle in war, Japanese infantry in panic flight. Casualties in their combat units touched 85-90 per cent. The senior Japanese officers who had conducted this operation were dismissed from their posts.

At Imphal and in the Arakan, the British could supply fighter and artillery cover for their transport aircraft and relieving columns for their surrounded forces; they won, and inflicted shattering defeats on the Japanese. Deep in Burma they had been able to do neither, and had been thrown back from one stronghold after another.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Maj. Gen. S. W. Kirby et al., The War Against Japan, Vol. III: The Decisive Battles, H.M. Stationery Office, 1961, describes the use of air supply as the foundation of British jungle tactics (pp. 127, 151), the Chindit operation (pp. 443-446), and Japanese infiltration in the Arakan (p. 137); Field Marshal the Viscount Slim, Defeat into Victory, David McKay Co. Inc., New York, 1961, pp. 452-455.

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Perhaps half the British officers in Malaya in the early years of the Emergency had taken part in these operations and so had a wealth of practical knowledge of air supply, its capabilities, and its limitations. There were to be no Dien Bien Phu in Malaya, no spectacular and abortive drops of paratroops, no regimental combat teams cut to fragments on the roads, no chance for the guerrillas to establish bases in the jungle. The army dominated the jungle, for the Royal Air Force was always overhead, either dropping supplies or coming down to pick up casualties. Deprived of their preferred and most profitable targets, motor convoys, and without a secure base, the guerrillas never knew when they would be hit by counter-insurgent forces that had noiselessly drifted through the jungle they had made their own.

The extent of the Security Forces' domination is suggested by Operation GINGER, in 1958, in which the 28th Commonwealth Brigade ambushed the Communists nine times, killing twelve men, while the communist score was zero both in ambushes and in kills. In their thirty-two meetings in the jungle, the Security Forces assigned to the brigade sighted and shot first in twenty-five cases,

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killing twenty-one and capturing two; the Communists shot first seven times, killing two.<sup>3</sup>

### AIR SUPPLY IN OPERATION

The resources committed to air supply in Malaya were modest and underscored the economy of the technique. One squadron of eight twin-engine transport aircraft was enough from June 1948 to December 1953, when a second squadron was committed. The eight aircraft could maintain 4,200 men on air supply. In thirty days a soldier in the jungle required 250 lbs. of supplies that had to be air-delivered. The monthly average of air-delivered supplies rose from 13 short tons in the period July 1948 - March 1949 to a peak of 324 in calendar year 1955, and then began to drop.<sup>4</sup>

The mechanism of air supply as it affects the soldier is described in the Director of Operations manual, The Conduct of Anti-Terrorist Operations in Malaya, but the controls on it to prevent its abuse and to permit the efficient scheduling of supplies are another matter. In

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<sup>3</sup>"Comander's Diary," 28 Commonwealth Brigade, 1958, SECRET.

<sup>4</sup>Director of Operations, Malaya. Review of the Emergency in Malaya from June 1948 to August 1957 (hereafter, Report on 1948-1957), App. C, SECRET; ARMLC (U.S. Army Liaison Office), Singapore, "Requirement for Air Supply in Malaya," December 13, 1954, ID 126/43., SECRET.

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1960 units on air supply were allocated a monthly tonnage, probably a combination of past experience and current missions, which they could not exceed without the prior approval of brigade headquarters. Although the RAF was prepared to make deliveries at twenty-four hours' notice to forward drop zones and at forty-eight to jungle forts<sup>5</sup> and base landing strips, this was reserved for emergencies. Two days' notice for forward drop zones and five days' for forts and landing strips was normal. The demands went to the Joint (RAF-Army) Operations Center, to the RAF Ground Liaison Officer, and to the 55th Air Drop Company of the Royal Army Service Corps. However, they were monitored at brigade headquarters, which would refuse them if stores could be moved by other means, if the request included too many luxury items, or if the unit had exceeded its monthly allocation.

Once supplies had been dropped, units were expected to make every effort consistent with security to salvage

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<sup>5</sup>Jungle forts were police posts established in the deep jungle, from which patrols circulated to hunt guerrillas and to which the aborigines came for trade and medical assistance. The forts were surrounded by tactical wire covered by machine-gun emplacements, but their chief protection lay in round-the-clock scouting and patrolling and the availability of battalion forces that could bring relief on short notice. To the author's knowledge, no jungle fort was ever attacked.

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parachutes and containers. As an aid in preparing landing zones, an explosive pack had been developed that could be dropped by liaison aircraft and contained enough explosives to clear a medium landing zone. Portable saws also were available. Small high-priority items could be dropped from liaison aircraft. They were packed by the unit rear echelons and clearly labeled with unit identification; designation of the subunit receiving the drop; drop zone grid reference; drop zone markings; radio frequency; and subunit call sign.<sup>6</sup>

### A BATTALION ON AIR SUPPLY

Early in 1949 the 2d Battalion of the Coldstream Guards went into eastern Malaya, in the area between the Cameron Highlands and the sea, a wild stretch of country. They were to form three columns and to reconnoiter, contact the aborigines, and destroy or disperse the guerrillas. Once they had eaten the rations in their packs, they would depend on air supply.

The 2 Coldstream Guards have left a vivid record of how air supply and its problems appeared to a battalion

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<sup>6</sup>"Commander's Diary," 28 Commonwealth Brigade, 1958 and March 1960, SECRET

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that was in the jungle for an extended stay.<sup>7</sup> Looking back on their adventures, the battalion commander thought that the RAF's skill in meeting requests was beyond praise. Drop zones were often very poor, the weather ranged from moderately good to bad, and the battalion's information on drop zones was often late and sometimes wrong. Receiving an airdrop was not a matter of standing about under trees to watch the manna fall. Rather, it meant that the receiving unit was immobilized for about thirty-six hours, first preparing the drop zone, then recovering and distributing supplies. For this reason, too, air supply for small parties was slow and uneconomical.

The battalion made a virtue of the time cost of an airdrop by having one every fourth day, which was for them not only the day to prepare the drop zone but a chance to rest and clean up after three days' march through the jungle (and it must be remembered that the Commonwealth forces marched through jungle, not along trails).

Because eastern Malaya tends to have rain in the afternoon, the drops had to be as early as possible in

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<sup>7</sup>The record of their Malayan tour by the 2 Coldstream Guards was the best of its kind that the author had seen. Professional problems were carefully analyzed, and experiences recorded with narrative skill. The papers were well presented, and their authors appeared to have overlooked nothing.

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the day, which meant finding and clearing a drop zone the day before. In every drop, some parachutes failed to open and some containers burst, though not on a scale to detract from the success of the operation. The battalion commander suggested that items liable to water spoilage be packed in watertight containers -- he pointed out that one was apt to find drop zone "near rivers, into which some packages would fall -- and that all items wrapped in sacks be enclosed in outer sacks.

As for the content of the drop, the 2 Coldstream Guards welcomed fresh food, which was easy to deliver. PX supplies were always in demand: the amount in the ration was inadequate, the men would forget to carry enough razor blades with them, and there was not enough candy. In 1949 the Commonwealth forces had not yet learned that smoking in the jungle gave them away at a surprising distance, and the Coldstream therefore wanted more cigarettes. They also suggested that there be a proper number of cooking devices with all drops.

One difficulty in arranging for airdrops was the radio traffic involved. Simply transmitting the demand took a great deal of radio time, and the major part of this was taken up with the enumeration of odd requests,

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such as the various PX supplies, unpronounceable medical items, and jungle boots by size. To ease this problem, the battalion commander suggested using a simple three-figure code. He also thought it would help if radiomen were kept better informed on what was going on in their battalion, and if they could recognize and use the more common local geographical terms. These last points conjure up the very human figure of a confused radioman struggling with names the like of which were not to be found near the Guards' barracks in London.<sup>8</sup>

### AIRDROPS VS. SECURITY

As operations went on in Malaya, men argued about the impact of air supply on security. One officer of the Special Air Service Regiment, the specialists in deep jungle operations, believed that normal air supply pinpointed the SAS' patrol bases and that the better method was to use helicopters that would follow ground contours on their flight in. He remarked that his troop had successfully surprised communist guerrillas the day after a helicopter resupply operation and only 1,000 yards from the troop base.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup>"Quarterly Historical Report," 2 Coldstream Guards, June 30, 1949, SECRET.

<sup>9</sup>"Operation Report on Operation GOGLET/GINGER" by Maj. A. A. Julius, D Squadron, 22 SAS Regiment, April 1958,

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The commander of the 3d Battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment, Lt. Col. John White, operating in the jungle fringe during the last years of the Malayan Emergency when, as he put it, the Communists were on the run, normally had supplies brought in by aborigine porters to avoid alerting the enemy by the noise of an airdrop. In so doing, however, he was aware that he was exploiting the advantages that the Security Forces had won by years of successful jungle operations, which, he stressed, had been supplied by air.<sup>10</sup>

It follows that the soldier himself must decide, on the basis of his estimate of the situation, whether to use transport aircraft, helicopter, or porter in the jungle. When the enemy is operating in bands of as many as 100 or 150 men, which approximates the rifle strength of an infantry company, only normal air supply will make it possible to defeat these bands in jungle warfare. Once they have been defeated and broken into small parties of five or ten guerrillas, then perhaps is the time to rely solely (rather than predominantly) on stealth and surprise

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included in "Commander's Diary," 28 Commonwealth Brigade, 1958, SECRET.

<sup>10</sup>Interview with Col. John White, Australian Military Attaché, Washington, D.C., 1962.

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and to have supplies brought in by small groups of porters. It is worth noting, however, that the parent formation of Col. White's battalion, the 28th Commonwealth Brigade, was still making routine use of air supply as late as 19 7.

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## II. DEPLOYMENT

The deployment of the Commonwealth army units in Malaya during most of the Emergency was marked by considerable dispersion (with battalions divided into so-called "company bases"), though this was compensated for by the will and ability to saturate lively target areas with soldiers when necessary. What permitted this dispersal -- and indeed made it necessary, if the guerrillas were to be eliminated -- was the fact that the enemy units also were dispersed; since the early days of the Emergency, the ability of the Commonwealth forces to conduct prolonged jungle operations had made it impossible for the guerrillas to mass their strength.

A powerful factor in deployment was the length of time that soldiers and combat units could operate in the jungle or its fringe without having their combat efficiency lowered by sickness and fatigue. Practice in this regard changed as experience gradually revealed what could be done and what brought the best results in terms of guerrillas killed. In the first weeks of the Emergency, most jungle operations lasted three days or less. By March of 1949, the period was three to four weeks, and planners were contemplating an operation that

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would keep a Gurkha battalion in the jungle, away from its base, for two months.<sup>11</sup> Gurkha officers were learning what their men could do. A company of the 1/6 Gurkha Rifles was in the jungle for twenty-seven days, the battalion record up to July 1949. Upon their return the men were none the worse physically but seemed not quite as alert as at the start. A company commander in another Gurkha battalion wrote that his men could do ten days "flat out" in the jungle but then needed a two-day rest.<sup>12</sup>

From these early experiences grew the practice of rotating platoons or sections, usually on the basis of twenty days in the jungle and ten days out. The first day out of the jungle the soldier bathed, rested, and patched up his gear. The second day he had a physical examination, followed by a detailed inspection of weapons and gear (with the soldier held to peacetime standards of accounting). Then came three days of leave, with movies and sports available close to the camp, before the

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<sup>11</sup>Letter dated March 28, 1949, "Future Developments 24-Hour Gurkha Pack Rations," an Appendix to quarterly Historical Report, "Hq Malaya District, March 31, 1950, SECRET.

<sup>12</sup>Appendix B to "Quarterly Historical Report," 1/2 Gurkha Rifles, June 30, 1949, SECRET.

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platoon reassembled and weapons were checked and zeroed. The last five of the ten days were spent largely in rehearsing and re-enacting contacts with the guerrillas and in target practice.<sup>13</sup> One battalion, in 1960, preferred to have its units ten days in the jungle to five days out. On such a cycle, the periods for examinations, inspections, rest, and retraining were correspondingly shorter.

The pressures that made it necessary to take men out of the jungle also operated on the battalion itself, making it necessary to withdraw the whole unit from time to time. This need fitted in well with the continuing requirement to keep battalions ready for large-scale war in Southeast Asia. Leaves were granted, weapons and other equipment checked and repaired, and deficiencies made good, and then the battalion reassembled to spend some weeks in exercises. The general policy, with the inevitable exceptions for operational reasons, aimed at two months of retraining out of every twelve in Malaya. In establishing this policy, the Commonwealth forces

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<sup>13</sup> Interview with Maj. Gen. Frank H. Brooke, London, 1962; "Commander's Diary," 1/3 E. Anglian, December 20, 1959-January 31, 1960, SECRET.

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consciously drew on their experience with combat fatigue in two world wars. One commander thought that the best single guide to a battalion's combat efficiency was the ratio of the number of guerrillas killed to the number of contacts with them, the kill/contact ratio; when this began to slide, it was high time to retrain the battalion <sup>14</sup>

Company bases were a collection of tents or shacks, with a few simple tin and wooden structures for kitchens and messhalls. They were set in clearings near the jungle or on rubber plantations. The typical overhead consisted of the company commander, his orderly, the company sergeant major, two cooks, a signaler or two, and a few clerks and sentries. Security at these installations was of a very high order. They were protected by wire entanglements, which were covered by medium and heavy machine guns in sandbagged emplacements. Close-in patrols operated around the clock. The machine guns were always manned. Radio linked companies with battalion and with one another, and was frequently tested. The men in the base -- overhead, troops resting, and the stand-by party -- had their alarm stations and stood-by at dawn and dusk.

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<sup>14</sup> Interview with Gen. Brooke.

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A reserve was earmarked for a counterattack role within the perimeter. Every man in the base fired his gun daily.

Each base had its stand-by party, which could go into action at ninety seconds' notice. Its food and ammunition were ready and the trucks warmed up. It numbered about twenty men, of whom half were always on duty, fully dressed, weapons at hand.

General Frank Brooke, looking back on his long experience in the Emergency, first as a brigade commander, then as General Officer Commanding the Federation Army, and finally as Director of Operations, stated that he had never known of a company base that was overrun by guerrillas.<sup>15</sup>

For the greater part of the Emergency, 1951 through 1955, the capital of each Malay state had a brigade headquarters next to police headquarters, and its commander was a member of the State War Executive Committee. At the next lower level, there was a battalion

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<sup>15</sup>Idem; Capt. A.G.E. Stewart Cox, "Operation TIGER," British Army Review, September 1959, CONFIDENTIAL; Kenneth Whitehead, History of the Somerset Light Infantry (Prince Albert's), 1946-1960, Wm. Clowes and Sons, 1961 (hereafter, The Somersets), p. 36.

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tactical headquarters operating at police circle headquarters. At the lowest level, the company commander ran his command post at police district headquarters.

As suggested above, battalions were seldom concentrated unless they were retraining. Thus, in 1954, headquarters, support, and headquarters companies of the 1st Battalion of the Queen's Royal Regiment were at Tampin, A and B companies at Rompin, C Company at South Johol, and the mortar platoon at Sialang, all of these in Negri Sembilan State, while D Company was some 50 miles away at Ayer Tahan. All except D were committed to food-denial Operation JEXYLL, in which they controlled Chinese settlements, carried out the innumerable tasks involved in food control, and welcomed an occasional chance to go out on patrol.<sup>16</sup> "This dispersion," explained a former chief of staff of the Malaya Command, "enables the battalion area to be adequately covered, information to be acted on quickly, and it facilitates deployment with less chance of being observed by collaborators with the enemy."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Journal of the Queen's Royal Regiment. November 1954, p. 170. For a description of food denial see below, p. 142.

<sup>17</sup>Brigadier K. R. Brazier-Creagh. "Anti-Terrorist Operations in Malaya, 1953-1954," Brassey's Annual, 1954.

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Until 1952, battalions were under brigades, which in turn reported to Headquarters Malaya District, but in that year the command structure took a form closer to what the soldier thinks of as normal, and also one that facilitated redeployment for major hostilities. The 1st Federation Division took over the north of the Federation, and the 17th Gurkha Division the south. The center, for several years, was under the 18th Independent Infantry Brigade.

Specifically, this meant that in 1954, for example, the 17th Gurkha Division, with ten battalions of infantry and with its headquarters at Seremban, had Johore, Negri Sembilan, Malacca, and Selangor. The 18th Independent Infantry Brigade, with four battalions, had Pahang. The Federation Division of seven battalions, with headquarters at Tai Ping, operated in Perlis, Kedah, Province Wellesley, Penang, Perak, and Kelantan. Of the entire twenty-one battalions, only eighteen or nineteen were available at any one time because of retraining schedules.

Combat support and service units, two armored car regiments, artillery, the Special Air Service Regiment, the signals, engineers, Royal Army Service Corps, Royal Army Medical Corps, provost, and Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers were present in Malaya, both for

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daily support and to ensure that, in case of need, divisions could function as such.<sup>18</sup>

#### FORMS OF MANEUVER

The wide dispersal of battalions and the fact that, for years, there was a battalion headquarters at every police circle headquarters did not mean that the Security Forces did not maneuver or that they would not mass their forces. Maneuvering and massing came to take forms appropriate to the Malayan scene, for, as the Emergency went on, the Commonwealth forces acquired considerable sophistication in their conduct of operations.

Thus, they learned that the guerrillas took an appreciable and predictable length of time to react to major movements of the opponent, and that it was possible to shift whole battalions (sometimes enough to triple government strength in a given area), leave only sentries at the posts vacated, carry out an operation, and return to home stations before the guerrillas could respond. It became accepted practice to gamble that the guerrillas

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<sup>18</sup>From a letter by Lt. Gen. Sir Hugh Stockwell, GOC Malaya, dated January 5, 1954, SECRET; Federation of Malaya, "Weekly News Summary," October 17, 1953.

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could not react to any move completed in three weeks or less, and on occasion as much as six weeks was risked with success. The main reason for this slow reaction time was that the various communist headquarters were widely separated and linked only by couriers who had to trudge through jungle.

Let us assume, for example, that a battalion of the Security Forces left the several company bases over which it was distributed. Every possible security precaution would be taken to hide the move and thus gain time, but eventually the local guerrilla agent would notice something untoward or be told of it by villagers. Next, he would have to verify the fact of the battalion's absence. (Any time after 1952 or 1953, the agent might also be working for Police Special Branch, which might well result in a few artful delays or deliberate uncertainties in his report.) Then, he would have to get in touch with the local guerrilla leader in the jungle, where decisions were made. This man, in turn, would have to call a meeting to discuss and verify the information he had just received (verification coming perhaps from agents who watched vehicle traffic -- a practice that the guerrillas stressed). The evidence and the resulting decisions would

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have to be conveyed by couriers to neighboring headquarters, because these would be involved in any major shift in tactics.

Movement by courier was very slow. The Asian's concept of time is different from that of the Westerner, and couriers dated themselves by the phases of the moon. The guerrillas, in general, were believed to find it very hard to keep track of time in the strange, circumscribed life of the jungle. To this delay in communication had then to be added the time necessary for other guerrilla headquarters to reach their decisions and, finally, for a striking force to be assembled.<sup>19</sup>

Given the guerrillas' slow reaction time, the fact that Special Branch was able to subvert many of their agents, and the mutual suspicion typical of Communists, the shift of a battalion from one area to another and back again before the guerrillas could respond not only became possible but permitted all manner of interesting permutations and combinations.

### FEDERATION-WIDE MANEUVER

Maneuver on a Federation-wide scale was first attempted in 1951, when General Sir Harold Briggs as

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<sup>19</sup>Interview with Gen. Brooke.

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Director of Operations tried to roll the guerrillas back from south to north. The effort did not succeed.

In 1953, the over-all weakening of the guerrillas, thanks to the resettlement and command provisions of the Briggs Plan, as well as the improvement in the police under Colonel Arthur Young and Mr. John H. Morton made it possible to set up more company bases in chosen areas without dangerously relaxing security elsewhere. Priority in this respect was given to areas where the guerrillas were weakest, in the center of Malaya, initially with the thought that, when they were defeated there, those areas could then be left to police and home guards and the troops shifted elsewhere, to Perak and Johore. In 1954, it was decided to keep troops in a given sector until they dominated it and had disrupted the local communist organization. This, in turn, necessitated taking troops from marginal areas and leaving them to police and home guards.<sup>20</sup>

Concentrating the effort in the middle of the peninsula proved an outstanding success in Pahang State

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<sup>20</sup> Report on 1948-1957, p. 10; Federation of Malaya, Annual Report (hereafter, Federation Report), 1954, pp. 6-7.

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in 1955. A series of four intensive food-denial operations there disintegrated the Min Yuen, and was later reported by the Director of Operations to have virtually destroyed the Malayan Communist Party in four-fifths of the state; it cut the main north-south communist courier routes on the east side of the Malayan mountain chain and recaptured one of the areas in which the guerrillas had come to feel relatively secure. Thereafter, curfews and food restrictions were lifted to make Pahang one of the largest "white" areas of the Federation.<sup>21</sup>

### MASS AND MANEUVER

By the end of 1955, the Directorate of Operations had grasped the practical application of mass and maneuver in the Malayan situation. The mass was more dispersed and the maneuver slower than anything ever imagined by George Patton or Heinz Guderian, but the principles still applied. From Pahang, the Security Forces drove a white belt across Malaya to reach the coast in Selangor and Negri Sembilan. There was a localized victory in South

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<sup>21</sup>Director of Operations, Malaya, Annual Report (hereafter, Director's Annual Report), 1955, pp. 2, 7, SECRET; Report on 1948-1957, pp. 10-11.

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Selangor in September 1955. The result was a large white area in Central Malaya, which enabled priority to shift from there to Selangor and Negri Sembilan in 1956.

To redeploy strength, the Directorate of Operations had elite Special Branch, psychological-war, food-denial, army, and police units shifted to areas with formidable targets. The smaller guerrilla groups and those in less strategic areas were left alone for the time being. Thus, Kedah, far to the north on the Thai border, with an estimated three hundred guerrillas, was garrisoned by only two rifle companies for some eighteen months. In the same period, Selangor and Negri Sembilan received the Security Forces' full attention. Although they were not cleaned up as rapidly as had been hoped, the trend in favor of the government was so obvious in 1957 that troops could be shifted south and north, to Johore and Perak. By August 1957, there were thought to be sixty-seven guerrillas left in Selangor and sixty-nine in Negri Sembilan. No outstanding leader survived in either state, and most communist branches were reduced to four or five members struggling for survival. The white belt was complete from coast to coast, and the next big maneuver was under way, with Federation (locally-raised) troops

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replacing overseas forces everywhere except in Penang,  
North Perak, and Johore.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Harry Miller, "The Emergency in Malaya," unpublished manuscript in the possession of General Sir Geoffrey Bourne (hereafter, Miller MS), pp. V-16 to V-20 (Miller had access to official records in Malaya); Report on 1948-1957, pp. 10, 11, 22.

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### III. LARGE VS. SMALL OPERATIONS

Once battalions are armed, trained, and deployed, the next question is how to use them. In Malaya, in the summer of 1948, army leaders were agreed that they would not let themselves be tied down in static defense but would go on the offensive with battalions and brigades, so as to prevent the Communists from trying to set up base areas in the jungle where they might form large bodies of regular troops.<sup>23</sup> In this respect the jungle sweeps of the early years of the Emergency were successful; the communist leadership had to admit that it could not pass from Phase 1 (terror) to Phase 2 (the setting up of bases).<sup>24</sup> But these big operations were not the answer to Phase 1, for they did not eliminate the guerrilla, they only fragmented his forces.

Viewing the results gained by large-scale operations, the Operations Section of GHQ FARELF, in late 1948, tersely summed up what was to remain true until the formal abandonment of large-scale jungle sweeps in 1951: Such operations -- by one or more battalions, with supporting

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<sup>23</sup>See above, pp. 29-31.

<sup>24</sup>See above, p. 89.

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arms, most likely with air support, under a task-force headquarters, and almost invariably dignified by an operations order and a code name -- frequently were successful in moving the enemy from his chosen hideout and away from his supply base, but they seldom resulted in casualties to him.<sup>25</sup>

A month later, communist reactions as reported by the North Malaya Sub-District supported this judgment. Large jungle sweeps of short duration, the guerrillas commented, neither harried nor worried them especially, but surprise raids and ambushes by small parties were greatly feared.<sup>26</sup> These, it should be noted, were not the opinions of the leaders of the guerrillas (whose recorded statements of that period were admitting their inability to set up bases and regular units) but those of the rank and file.

In the years 1948-1951, two operational concepts were applied against the Communists again and again

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<sup>25</sup>Letter from GSOI (Ops) to GHQ FARELF, "Lessons from Operations," November 8, 1948, CR/FARELF/8023/G(G) SECRET.

<sup>26</sup>Weekly ISUM 'o. 22, December 9, 1948, Appendix C to "Quarterly Historical Report," North Malaya Sub-District, December 31, 1948, SECRET.

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(except by the 1st Battalion of the Suffolk Regiment, which had hit upon the importance of food to the guerrilla and was successfully exploiting it). The first was to surround an area thought to contain guerrillas and then send in a task force to kill any guerrillas within it. The second was to drive the guerrillas on to a prearranged line of ambushes.

In the first quarter of 1949, North Malaya Sub-District carried out thirteen major operations and had four under way at its close. Operation NAWAB, typical of many, had the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry (KOYLI) attacking into an area thought to hold Communists. The 1/6 Gurkha Rifles acted as stops behind them while the armored cavalry and the police set up ambushes to the south and west of the area. As a cover plan, the KOYLIs and the Gurkhas pretended to be screening squatter areas. NAWAB yielded one guerrilla killed and fifty-nine arrests. Operation GULL put a company ashore from landing craft after a naval bombardment, a novel approach resulting in the arrest of one known guerrilla and the discovery of six camps.

Operation ALBATROSS, here chosen at random, may be taken as an example of the efforts made and the results

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obtained in northern Malaya in late 1948 and early 1949. It was the work of three companies of the 1/6 Gurkha Rifles, operating from November 25 to December 11, 1948. Information on the guerrillas was poor, as was normal for the period. The Gurkhas did their best, with a lot of hard patrolling in the Baling-Weng area. They found four camps, screened 1,198 squatters (of whom 14 were arrested), and killed four guerrillas.<sup>27</sup>

Operation LEO in Johore State, which lasted for ten days of October 1949, has left fairly detailed records illustrating the problems faced and the procedures then used. The troops involved were the 1/2 Gurkha Rifles with attached elements of the Seaforth Highlanders, twenty-four platoons in all. The area of Operation LEO was about 74,000,000 square yards of jungle. Information on the enemy contained in the operations order was brief: the guerrillas' behavior indicated that they thought the area important, and they had therefore been left alone to encourage them to concentrate there.

The orders were that the twenty-four platoons should sweep from the line of departure to phase line 1 and from

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<sup>27</sup>Weekly ISUMs for November-December 1948, ibid., March 31, 1949, SECRET.

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there to phase line 2. Phase lines were so arranged that the troops converged into a series of ever-smaller boxes. Entry into each box was preceded by bombing and strafing. Aircraft would be on forty minutes' notice throughout the operation. In the last phase, it was thought, the guerrillas would be penned in an area of six grid squares. One company would then enter this area and spend twenty-four hours ferreting them out.

Looking back on LEO, the Gurkha commander felt that the air strikes had alerted the guerrillas, and that the troops, who moved in a line of small columns, were simply too thin on the ground to catch the enemy.<sup>28</sup> Twenty-four platoons spread over an area of 74,000,000 square yards were not enough for the task, even if the operation order enjoined them to "search carefully."

If the reasons for LEO's relative futility seem obvious in retrospect, the occasional successes with this kind of operation are all the more puzzling because of their rarity. One of these exceptions was CONSTELLATION in Johore, in September-October 1949, which yielded thirty-two kills, twenty-three captures, and fifteen surrenders.

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<sup>28</sup> "Quarterly Historical Report' and Appendixes, 1/2 Gurkha Rifles, December 31, 1949, SECRET.

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Typical, by contrast, was the experience of North Malaya Sub-District, whose large operations in the second quarter of 1949 yielded one kill, no surrenders, and no captures, whereas its routine patrolling resulted in nineteen kills and twenty-six arrests.<sup>29</sup>

Such arrests should not be thought of in the context of normal urban police operations, for they presupposed that the prisoner had been caught in the act. In 1948-1949, given the low level of available intelligence, arrests by patrols meant that a man had been caught with a weapon at hand, or in uniform, or in possession of a document such as a membership card or a receipt for contributions made. (Guerrillas and the Min Yuen were not as careful then as they were to be later, and the "card-carrying" Communist appeared frequently.) Typical of what patrols could bag in those days were eight young Chinese, who were surprised and arrested on January 22, 1949, in a hut that contained quantities of uniforms and small-arms ammunition.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>29</sup>Weekly ISUM, North Malaya Sub-District 2d quarter 1949, SECRET; "Review of 1949, 1 July - 31 December 1949," War Office, MI Files, p. 3, SECRET.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

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THE LARGE OPERATION CRITICIZED

Having taken part in many of these large operations and contrasted their results with those of daily routine patrolling, officers began to criticize them. As already emphasized, it was the very success of the jungle sweeps that was making them ineffective. The Communists had been fragmented and so were no longer good targets for forces operating as battalions; they had become targets for patrols. Aggressive patrolling also could quickly uncover any attempt of the enemy to mass, and such a discovery promptly resulted in the assembling of a powerful task force that would compel the guerrillas again to scatter and hide. What the critics deplored was the tendency to persist in large jungle sweeps long after they had ceased to yield results.

The 1/10 Gurkha Rifles reported that, after the first few months of the Emergency, having been left to their own devices, they had switched from jungle sweeps to small patrols operating offensively within very restricted areas, a method which they called "saturation patrolling." Early in 1949, the 1st Battalion of the Devonshire Regiment expressed its preference for comparatively small (ten-man) parties sent out to operate several days at a time in

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widely separated sectors of jungle. Headquarters Malaya District, in this case analogous to division headquarters, noted that in Perak and Selangor concentrated patrolling had been successful; the patrol that went out in the morning and came home at night did not worry the guerrillas but a large number of small harassing patrols in the jungle over a period of days or weeks had a strong effect.<sup>31</sup>

Writing in 1949, Major E. R. Robinson, a rifle company commander, spoke out bluntly against the large operation. The bigger the operation, said he, and the higher the level at which it was planned, the less its chance of success the buildup and the preparations were impossible to conceal, it was difficult to control troops in the jungle, and the guerrillas simply vanished.<sup>32</sup>

In October 1951 General Briggs in effect agreed with Major Robinson, saying that deep-jungle penetration was to be carried out by small parties acting on information, rather than by large forces whose operations usually

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<sup>31</sup>"Quarterly Historical Report." 1/10 Gurkha Rifles, September 30, 1948 SECRET; "Quarterly Historical Report," 1 Devons, March 31, 1949, SECRET; Hq Malaya District, "Weekly Intelligence Review No. 10, January 6, 1949, SECRET."

<sup>32</sup>Maj. E. R. Robinson, "Reflections of a Company Commander in Malaya," Arm. Quarterly, October 1950.

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proved abortive. Six years later, the Directorate of Operations summed up the experience of the campaign with the statement that operations of large numbers of troops designed to clear specific areas of the jungle had not succeeded and that, under Malayan conditions, the army had had to accept a degree of dispersion inconsistent with its usual practice.<sup>33</sup>

LEARNING TO HANDLE SMALL OPERATIONS

Simultaneously with the large jungle operations that were proving increasingly useless, the Security Forces were conducting many operations by smaller forces. These ranged from fairly sizable operations down to the patrol with a police guide. FARELF's listing of combined police military operations toward the end of 1948 conveys an idea of their number. These were operations so small that they were not described individually; they were merely counted. In them, some policemen and some soldiers, of varying numbers and technical specialties, worked together in small parties.

<sup>33</sup>Lt. Gen. Sir Harold Briggs, K.C.B., Director of Operations, Report on the Emergency in Malaya (hereafter, Briggs Report), The Government Press, Kuala Lumpur, 1951, p. 36, SECRET; Report on 1948-1957, p. 27.

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Fig. 11

## COMBINED POLICE/MILITARY OPERATIONS IN NOVEMBER AND DECEMBER 1948<sup>34</sup>

Period Ending	Number
November 13, 1948	62
19	38
26	71
December 3, 1948	110
10	59
17	67
24	84
31	50

November 1948, it is worth noting, was a time of mounting pressure from the Security Forces, for it was the first month in which "contacts" (occasions when Security Forces attacked guerrillas) outnumbered "incidents" (instances of guerrilla attacks on the public or the Security Forces).<sup>35</sup>

These myriad small operations, in the years 1948 to 1951, taught the techniques that were to prove so effective once the Security Forces had developed a workable operational concept. Foreshadowing later successes was the work of the 1st Battalion of the Suffolk Regiment,

<sup>34</sup>From FARFELF Situation Reports for the dates shown.

<sup>35</sup>FARFELF Intelligence Review, November 1948, SECRET.

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which landed in Singapore in July 1949 at half-strength. They had to add personnel and undergo training in jungle war simultaneously, so that they began under a real handicap. By comparison, the 1st Battalion of the Devonshire Regiment, which had been in Malaya since the Emergency began, was a veteran unit; one of the more successful battalions of this period, the Devons had an approach to operational problems typical of the time. It thus may be profitable and fair to compare the practices of these two battalions.

The Suffolks were unique in that someone among them had hit upon and was exploiting the importance of food to the guerrilla, and someone (perhaps the same soldier) was not merely acknowledging the importance of intelligence but producing it. Thus, the Suffolks' operations orders said that offensive patrol bases would be sited near food supply areas so as to deny these to the enemy; the Devons admitted that they did not know how the enemy was fed. Intelligence annexes to the Suffolks' orders listed guerrillas, both organized and individual, with comments that included the names of their units and persons. The Devons' orders and reports referred to the guerrilla in such vague and general terms as "forty bandits.

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The Suffolks' final score is unknown to the writer. But by December 1952, having arrived in July 1949, they were hoping to score their two hundredth kill before returning home. This performance meant they were in a class with the Fijian and East African battalions, who in 1953 were killing guerrillas at the rate of 60.5 a year, and compared favorably with the Gurkhas, who were second-best with 32.7. It must be remembered that the Suffolks began their work long before resettlement, reorganization, and the reform of the intelligence system.<sup>36</sup>

### COMMAND AND CONTROL

The nature of command and control in jungle war emerged gradually. There was growing recognition that the battle was going to be fought by junior officers and NCOs, which meant that their seniors had to train them to operate independently and then trust them. This did not always come easily; the commander of the 1/2 Gurkha Rifles has mentioned the company commander who patrolled

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<sup>36</sup>"Quarterly Historical Report" and Appendixes, 1 Suffolks, September 1 and December 31, 1949, and March 31, 1950, SECRET; "Quarterly Historical Report," 1 Devons, March 31, 1950, SECRET; "25 Field Regiment History, 1 April 1952 - 31 March 1953," Appendix A, SECRET.

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daily with one platoon while the other two stayed in the base. The commander of the 2d Coldstream Guards, in contrast to such rigidity, preferred to give all ranks a clear idea of the plan and their tasks and to put his faith in the common sense and judgment of the independent patrol commander. In this he was not giving way to overenthusiasm, for he admitted that the available number of men qualified for such command limited the number of patrols he was able to put out. He also underscored certain limitations on the role of the commander, who could not, he thought, shift troops about to meet enemy movement on short tactical notice. The best thing to do, therefore, was to give the troops what information was available, direct them into a general area, and leave the problem to them.<sup>37</sup>

An early experiment with wide deployment and the independent action of small units took place in Johore State in February 1949. There the Seaforth Highlanders were ordered to kill or capture all guerrillas in the area

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<sup>37</sup>Appendix E to "Quarterly Historical Report," 1/2 Gurkha Rifles, June 30, 1949, SECRET; Appendix A to "Quarterly Historical Report," 2 Coldstream Guards, June 30, 1949, SECRET.

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between the Labis-Buloh Kasap road and the Johore-Pahang state boundary, but the Scots decided against plodding through the area from one side to the other. Instead, they divided it into company sectors and ordered the companies to establish a series of firm bases within these sectors from which to operate. Sector commanders were instructed to take every precaution to avoid being surprised by superior forces. Patrols working far from their bases were to number not less than sixteen of all ranks.<sup>38</sup>

These several ideas and practices -- detailed intelligence on individuals, decentralized operations by small units working out of patrol bases in the jungle and the jungle fringe -- included tactics and techniques of great promise. The widespread deployment of battalions was basically sound. What was needed was an operational concept that would bring all these things together, one that would permit small units to operate freely and effectively and yet be part of a major operation for which higher authority had decided to mass its resources within a critical area.

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<sup>38</sup>"Quarterly Historical Report." 1 Seaforth's, March 31, 1949, SECRET.

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Food denial was that needed concept, and operations here analyzed thus fall into two classes: those undertaken before the initiation of food denial and those undertaken thereafter.

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### IV. LARGE AND SMALL OPERATIONS AFTER FOOD DENIAL

The resettlement of squatters in 1950-1952 made it possible to control the movement of individuals and of what they might attempt to carry from the villages to the jungle and back again. This aim had been one of the arguments in favor of resettlement. In realizing it, the Director of Operations, General Briggs, sought to apply certain operational concepts; he wanted to force the guerrillas to shape their operations and their organization to his will and to fight on ground of his choosing. By moving the squatters from the jungle's edge into fenced settlements, he knew he was greatly complicating the task of the indispensable food-carrying links between them and the guerrillas and would be able to force the food-carriers to run a series of ambushes as they walked back and forth between settlements and jungle. The guerrilla, who had to eat, would have no choice but to accept the risk, and the attrition of his own and his sympathizers' ranks would thus be an inevitable, though slow, process. (The analogy with a naval blockade comes to mind.)

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Not until 1953, however, did some unknown individual or staff unit think of trying to starve out a specific group of guerrillas within a well-defined area. This concept, called "food denial," soon became the basis of all operations against the guerrillas. It meant bringing into the chosen area enough police and soldiers to check all people and parcels going through village gates, to search all vehicular traffic, to check domestic food stocks, and to put ambushes and patrols through the area. The guerrillas would have enough food on hand to manage for some weeks, perhaps even two or three months, but then hunger would drive them to risk seeking resupply. Operation GINGER, the most successful of these food denial operations, required twenty soldiers and police to every guerrilla.<sup>39</sup>

The phrase used above, "to put patrols and ambushes through the area," implied a wide variety of operations

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<sup>39</sup>For a discussion of General Briggs' concepts, and of food-denial operations in general, see R. Sunderland, Resettlement and Food Control in Malaya (U), The RAND Corporation, RM-4173-SA, September 1964, p. 34 and passim, SECRET; food denial is described as the basis of operations by the Director of Operations in his DOPS.S. 10/3, "Food Denial Policy," October 11, 1956, ID 2032639, SECRET.

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in an equally wide variety of terrain: operating patrols and ambushes in the jungle (some based on information and some not); patrols and ambushes in jungle fringe and rubber plantations; patrolling near settled areas; ambush on information near settled areas; and enforcing food restrictions.

### AN OVER-ALL QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

Between 1953 and 1957, the British Operation Research Section, Far East, prepared a series of analyses in which it evaluated army and police operations from the time of resettlement on into the period in which food denial was the basic operational concept. It reported that the large majority of operations were patrols and ambushes, in which army and police elements played similar roles. Their small parties harassed the guerrillas beyond what might be imagined from the number of kills and contacts alone. Large operations mounted against camps and based on specific information were comparatively rare.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup>British Operation Research Section, Far East (hereafter, BORS/FE), Memos No. 6/53, p. 1, and 3/53, p. 12, SECRET; DOPS.S. 10/3.

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Fig. 12

## ARMY CONTACTS BY TYPES OF ENGAGEMENT JANUARY 1954 - JUNE 1954<sup>41</sup>

Type	Jan-Jun '54	Jul-Dec '54	Jan-Jun '55
Patrols	47.6%	43.5%	40.7%
Ambushes	36.7	32.5	33.0
Attacks on locations	15.7	24.0	26.3
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

The increase in the number of attacks on occupied locations -- camps, gardens, and bivouacs -- resulted from a directive, in the latter half of 1954, that troops were to be assigned specific areas of jungle in which to eliminate specified guerrilla units. In terms of kills per contact, they became the most profitable (e.g., 1.05 in January-June 1955, as against 0.62 for ambush, the next most profitable). From March 1953 to July 1954, 94.2 per cent of preplanned attacks on camps, and 100 per cent of those on bivouacs, killed at least one guerrilla. The total number of attacks of both kinds was 156.<sup>42</sup>

Battalions scored about 20 per cent more patrol contacts than they succeeded in springing ambushes. The

<sup>41</sup>BORS/FE, TN No. 4/55, CONFIDENTIAL.

<sup>42</sup>BORS/FE, Memo No. 8/54, SECRET.

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average number of contacts was one per month. Information was important and helpful, for it took a patrol twice as long to make a contact when it was not operating on information. Interestingly, the more contacts a battalion made the more kills did it have per contact, possibly because the skills that produced a large number of contacts also ensured their effective exploitation. Usually, only three men fired in a patrol contact, probably because the contacts were so brief that the men at the rear of the patrol could not get into position to fire.<sup>43</sup>

The British Operation Research Section compared the effectiveness of patrols and ambushes based on information with those not based on information. It found that, in 1952, the odds of achieving a contact on the strength of information were 1 in 10 for an ambush and 1 in 17 for a patrol, and that the absence of information reduced these odds to 1 in 33 and 1 in 88, respectively.<sup>44</sup>

About 35 per cent of all contacts were ambushes. Without information, in what came to be called "speculative"

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<sup>43</sup>BORS/FE, Memo No. 3/53, p. 12, SECRET.

<sup>44</sup>BORS/FE, Memo No. 1/53, SECRET.

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ambushing, action was taken on the basis of a general knowledge of guerrilla habits. The ambushing of a guerrilla track or of a guerrilla camp, however, was not speculative, for knowledge of a track or a camp was tangible information. The number of successful ambushes reflected the amount of specific information available to a unit.<sup>45</sup>

The experience of ambush units showed that it was twice as effective to cover the area within which contact was expected with a number of very small parties as to assign a larger number of men to the enemy's likely route. For the guerrillas were very conscious of security and, though they might well keep a rendezvous, would be most careful to approach from an unexpected direction. The leader who planned to ambush them by lining his men up along a particular track thus committed the classic error of premature commitment of force.<sup>46</sup>

As regards the hour of day, 40 per cent of all ambushes were sprung between 7 and 11 a.m., and 20 per cent between 6 and 9 p.m. Seventy per cent were sprung

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<sup>45</sup>BORS/FE, Memo: No. 1/54, p. 8, and No. 6/54, p. 5, SECRET; No. 1/57, p. 60, CONFIDENTIAL.

<sup>46</sup>BORS/FF, Memo No. 1/57, p. 60.

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within six hours of the time that the ambush position was first occupied.

The range at which to open fire was of critical importance once the guerrillas had entered the ambush area. Analysis of past ambushes showed that fire should be opened at a range of no more than 20 yards by day and well under that at night. Apparently, the probability of the guerrilla's successfully darting into concealment was a function of his distance from the muzzles of the ambush party's guns.

Analysis of patrol contacts showed that the chance of successful contact fell off sharply after a patrol had been absent from its base six hours. The times at which contacts occurred were spread out over the 24 light hours, but most encounters took place between 9 a.m. and 1 p.m. Once in contact, patrols were most effective if they had been moving in an open formation, though this depended somewhat upon the nature of the country. It was desirable that patrols not number more than fifteen men unless they were in open country.

Once the patrol made contact with the guerrillas, its chance of scoring a kill fell off sharply if fire was opened at more than 100 yards. If possible, patrols were

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instructed to close the range before firing. It was essential also that they take time for careful aim before firing, shooting from the hip was futile.<sup>47</sup>

The order of usefulness of the different weapons in patrol contacts and sprung ambushes in 1952 (as based on the number of times each had to be fired to produce a kill) was as follows:<sup>48</sup>

Fig. 1)

## WEAPONS IN ORDER OF THEIR MERIT

For Patrols	For Ambushes
Carbine	Bren light machine gun
Bren light machine gun	Carbine
Owen or Sten	Owen or Sten
submachine gun	submachine gun
Rifle	Rifle

<sup>47</sup>These findings of the operations researchers show an interesting parallel to statements on aiming and ranges in Lt. McGivern, Fast and Fancy Revolver Shooting, Bullett Publishing Company, Lewistown, Montana, 1954, p. 231. McGivern (speaking, of course, of the revolver) says that the extra time is time well spent, for it permits the average performer, who has had some training and experience, to combine fast reaction and good shooting very consistently at ranges up to and including 200 yards. McGivern's measurements indicated that the first shot could be got off in from 0.9 to 1.6 seconds. As the range opened, the time required to place an accurate shot increased accordingly, so that a well-placed shot at 50 yards in three seconds was "very good performance." Shooting from the hip at 50 yards almost always missed.

<sup>48</sup>As yet as otherwise indicated, the statistics on patrols and ambushes in the pages below are taken from ARMS II, Report No. 1/53, Staff.

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The following breakdown of the total number of successful ambushes and patrol contacts between May 1952 and the end of April 1953 also permits a comparative appraisal of the performance of the army, the police, and the guerrillas in this period, five years after the start of the Emergency.<sup>49</sup>

Fig. 14

## THE PERFORMANCE OF ARMY AND POLICE IN AMBUSH AND PATROL MAY 1952 - APRIL 1953

	May-Aug '52	Sep-Dec '52	Jan-Apr '53
<u>Police Patrols</u>			
Contacts	158	102	117
Kills	53	22	16
Captures	4	5	4
Kills & captures per contact	.36	.26	.16
<u>Army Patrols</u>			
Contacts	200	161	170
Kills	75	53	76
Captures	9	7	5
Kills & captures per contact	.42	.37	.48
<u>Police Ambushes</u>			
Sprung ambushes	85	79	70
Kills	53	47	31
Captures	3	3	2
Kills & captures per ambush	.65	.63	.56
<u>Army Ambushes</u>			
Sprung ambushes	109	135	95
Kills	77	100	83
Captures	6	2	4
Kills & captures per ambush	.76	.75	.91

49BRS/PE, Memo No. 4/53, Tables 2, 11, 13, SECRET.

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The guerrillas' performance in terms of successful ambushes in the same period is far inferior to that of either army or police and shows how successfully the Security Forces had seized the initiative.

Fig. 15

## AMBUSHES SPRUNG AND CASUALTIES INFLICTED BY GUERRILLAS

MAY 1953 APRIL 1953

(Comparable scores by the Security  
Forces are given in parentheses)

	May-Aug '52	Sep-Dec '52	Jan-Apr '53
Ambush against police	17 (83)	10 (79)	3 (59)
Ambush against army	5 (109)	8 (135)	1 (95)
Security Force casualties	47 (130)	9 (147)	7 (114)

The bases from which the Security Forces' infantry companies operated, protected as they were by aggressive patrols, barbed wire, and machine guns, defied any effort by the guerrillas. Police posts, however, offered the guerrillas a target for which there was nothing comparable on the guerrilla side. Attacks on them yielded 49, 13, and 8 killed in action in the three periods analyzed.

The cost in casualties to the Security Forces of their patrol contacts and ambushes was very low.

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Fig. 16

## SECURITY FORCE CASUALTIES MAY 1952 - APRIL 1953 (Guerrilla losses in parentheses)

	May-Aug '52	Sep-Dec '52	Jan-Apr '53
Killed in patrol contacts	13 (148)	2 (75)	5 (92)
Killed while ambushing	5 (130)	2 (147)	4 (114)

As will be seen, the Security Forces' successful performance was the result of a whole constellation of skills and concepts.

### AN EARLY OPERATION

Operation NASSAU was the rooting out of guerrillas from a swamp covering some 100 square miles in Selangor State. It lasted ten months. During nine of these, the principal burden was borne by the 1st Battalion of the Royal Hampshire Regiment, which for a time had the highest score of any battalion in Malaya.

NASSAU took place in the district of Kuala Langat, the southernmost part of Selangor State. The district is 35 by 25 miles in size, with 60,000 people, most of them Malay but including also important Chinese and Indian

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minorities. Most of the action took place in and around a 100 sq mi area of swamp virtually trackless except for a logging section in the western part. The ground looks deceptively dry, but the unsuspecting traveler sinks into it, sometimes beyond help. Visibility is seldom over 30 yards. In this forbidding wilderness, the guerrillas had built camps on log platforms and had frightened the local inhabitants into supporting them.

On September 29, 1954, the guerrillas beheaded a Chinese boy and murdered two rubber tappers. The effect on public morale was serious. On December 1, the Hampshires were given military responsibility for Selangor, and planning got under way to exterminate this group of guerrillas.

Phase 1 of the operation (December 21, 1954, to January 9, 1955) saw the institution of strict food denial, while C Company began to operate in the swamp.

Phase 2 opened at 6 a.m. on January 9 with the full orchestra. There were at hand the 25-pdr howitzers of the 25th Field Regiment RA, mortars of the 11th Independent Troop 'A' and of the RAF Regiment, armored cars of the 11th Hussars, as well as police, Home Guard, the RAF, and the RAAF. There was considerable shelling and

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bombing, with the aim of making the swamp untenable and driving the guerrillas on to a line of ambushes. But nothing happened. The swamp was big, and the guerrillas were prepared to sit tight. The artillery program now was changed to harassing fire at night. Ambushes continued, and patrolling was stepped up to raise civilian morale. Patrols began to work the deep swamp in numbers. Food denial continued.

January and February passed with no contacts and little information, a time lag which by 1958 was to be recognized as normal in any food-denial operation, while the guerrillas were living off their stocks.

On March 17, the Special Branch reported some attractive information, and an ambush was set. When the ambush was ninety-three hours old and the second party was manning it, three guerrillas appeared. Two were killed and one was wounded, to be killed later. The first two dead were identified as the men who had beheaded the Chinese boy.

Nothing more was seen or heard of the guerrillas for another five weeks, while the Hampshire continued patiently and doggedly to crisscross the swamp. Then, on April 22, they were told that the guerrillas planned to

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contact a logging party. The 4th Platoon set two ambushes unseen by the loggers and bagged one guerrilla. In three-and-a-half months, three companies of infantry with generous support had eliminated three guerrillas.

The month of May was a complete blank. In June, the 11th Platoon stumbled on a camp in the swamp, killing one terrorist and capturing another. A few days later, a party which had been four nights in ambush received good information and killed two guerrillas. Soon after, the No. 3 man among the terrorists surrendered with his mistress. He reported that food denial had been most effective and had caused two deaths. By late June, twelve guerrillas had been eliminated, and twenty-five more were known to be left operating in the area.

On July 7 two companies of Fijians were brought in to speed up operations. During the week of July 14 every man was committed to the swamp with generous air support, but there were no immediate results. The process was repeated for a period beginning on July 24, and this time three of the Communists surrendered, saying that pressure and hunger had become unbearable. Among them was the No. 2 man of the terrorists, who guided the Security Forces to No. 1, an instance of the "snowball effect" that was to

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become familiar. Between August 15 and September 20 there were two captures and seven more surrenders. On September 22 the area was declared "white," and all restrictions were lifted accordingly.

The Security Forces had expended 60,000 shells, 30,000 trench mortar bombs, and 2,000 aerial bombs. Every guerrilla eliminated cost the Hampshire alone 1,200 man-days of ambush or patrol. NASSAU illustrated the application of food denial, the keeping of a battalion in an area long enough for its men to know it as well as the guerrilla did, the use of small parties within an operational framework, and the extensive employment of air and artillery. Perhaps most important, it proved that soldiers of European stock could operate effectively for months on end in the worst possible sort of tropical terrain and that the Security Forces could place unendurable pressure on guerrillas who had sought shelter in the deepest recesses of tropical swamps.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>50</sup>Lt. Col. P. H. M. "Operation NASSAU," The British Army Review, February 1957, p. 29, CONFIDENTIAL; The Royal Hampshire Regiment Journal, February 1957, p. 29. The Hampshire made considerable use of their heavy weapons for harassing fire in Malaya; indeed, the battalion appears to have found a use for all available fire support. In 1954-1956, it averaged 90,000 rounds of machine-gun and 1,600 rounds of 3-in and 4.2-in mortar ammunition expended monthly on harassing missions alone, most of it at night ("Support Company Notes," The Royal Hampshire Regiment Journal, November 1956).

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### ROUTINE OPERATIONS IN THE JUNGLE FRINGE

Patrols and ambushes in the jungle fringe might be carefully prepared operations involving displays of virtuosity. Usually, however, they were months of patient, monotonous effort; yet the soldier knew that any second might bring the excitement of contact. The Journal of the Queen's Royal Regiment has recorded a typical day of estate patrolling in late 1955. It began at first light, when a patrol found the telephone wire cut along a main road. A small party, guided by a tracker dog and an Iban tracker, went out to investigate. 1400 hours: A latex truck was reported burning on an estate. Out went a platoon with dogs and Iban trackers, only to find that the guerrillas had an hour's start. Their track was spotted, but lost in swamp after some 1,000 yards. The platoon leader reported accordingly by radio, and battalion put two or three platoons into likely cutoff positions. 2130 hours: Shots were heard. Neighboring planters telephoned their estimates of the azimuths. The incident was located, and the standby party of the nearest company turned out with dogs. On learning that the local special constables had seen lights approaching their barbed wire and fired, the party searched the area for an hour.

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If such a search unit found nothing, it would return to the post, and those of its members who were not on the list to be dressed, armed, and ready would go back to bed.

Aside from such action in response to the possibility of an attack or other incident, there was routine day and night patrolling, as well as frequent ambushing of likely guerrilla routes.<sup>51</sup> The soldiers thought this routine boring. One member of the Queen's Royal Regiment compared it unfavorably with actual jungle operations:

Jungle operations were few and far between and provided a pleasant change from the fatigue of the estate patrolling -- in fact it was much preferred. Estate patrolling with its before-dawn starts and frequent after-dark conclusions, its alarms and excursions resulting both from minor incidents both by day but more frequently by night led to a great loss of sleep; in the jungle it is only in the more exceptional circumstances that movement takes place in darkness.<sup>52</sup>

Comments such as these, implying that night operations were routine and showing the British soldier's preference for jungle operations over the patrolling of cultivation, frequently appeared in regimental journals.

<sup>51</sup>Journal of the Queen's Royal Regiment, November 1956, p. 57.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., p. 56.

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The experience of a Welsh battalion (possibly limited to estate and new-village duties because personnel turnover had forced a complete rebuilding of the unit in Malaya) shows how tedious these essential tasks could be. In the first six months after being committed to operations, the battalion killed but one guerrilla and had one of its officers wounded. Its operations remained within the framework of the antiguerrilla concept; they consisted of food restriction measures, rubber and jungle patrolling in areas where good information was lacking, and escort duties. Rifle companies were forty miles and more from battalion headquarters. And at least one platoon was usually broken into four-man parties who lived with the local police and helped supervise the central cooking of rice.<sup>53</sup>

### A PREPLANNED OPERATION

An example of what was done in the area between jungle and village when Special Branch had hot intelligence was Operation PETARD, mounted by the Queen's Royal Regiment, whose normal routine was described earlier. PETARD was a

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<sup>53</sup> Cooked rice spoils quickly in tropical climate. One of the refinements of food denial, and a most effective one, was to cook all the rice for a village in one kitchen.

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company-size ambush of a guerrilla food party near a village of resettled Chinese in Johore State. Special Branch had reported that a ton of food was to be collected by thirty to forty guerrillas in about a week's time. At 1915 hours on the appointed day, the food was to be passed over the perimeter wire by organized sympathizers (called "Masses Executives") to six guerrillas outside the wire. It was then to be dumped temporarily in a thick clump of trees and brush 50 yards away. The villagers were believed to be sympathetic to the guerrillas and to have organized an elaborate warning system involving small boys, rubber tappers and their dogs, and cyclists. Special Branch promised four days' warning and a twenty-four-hour alert.

To anticipate the particular difficulties created by these circumstances, the military spent days in planning, rehearsal, and preparations. The first problem for the Security Forces was that of approaching the area of the food pick-up. It was solved by planning to leave the base on the four-day signal with full kit and food, assemble in a secret camp within striking distance, and then move out on the night scheduled for the food collection.

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The company commander made four reconnaissance sorties, one of them by air, another in civilian disguise as a sewer inspector. Platoon commanders walked over the approach route from 0230 hours on so that they would know it by night. Then they settled down in the assembly area and spent the day there, sweltering in the sun and rain, to listen and grow accustomed to the normal neighborhood sounds. They returned to camp at 2130.

Planning called for two assault and three cutoff groups. The assault groups, of ten and eight men respectively, each had two Bren guns with flashlights mounted on them, rifle grenades, and a small ground searchlight. The cutoff groups would run into position when the shooting started. Mortars would be used to set high explosives and flares on checkpoints.

With so many groups involved, it was essential that they all know their area of fire. The site was laid out on training grounds, and the soldiers ran through the drill over and over. In addition, they practiced firing at night and at obscure targets. To perfect their timing, groups went over similar routes with the loads they would carry on the appointed night. Deceptive measures were devised to conceal the move out.

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The warning notes came, and the company moved. About 2,500 yards from the village, the soldiers with four days' rations detrucked and moved into a patch of overgrown vegetation. There they were concealed by 1200 hours, 500 yards from the main road, 200 yards from the nearest rubber trees. Here, seventy men hid for four days. There was no smoking, no cooking, and talking by whisper only. Sentries, commanders, and water carriers alone were allowed to move.

After the four days, Special Branch reported that nothing would happen for three to four days more, and sixty of the men were allowed an evening off to get food and return. To lessen the strain, the soldiers were now allowed tea and cigarettes between 1400 and 1600 and at 1800. For the next four days, they also did daily physical training in place and held quizzes and discussion groups.

Then the word came to move out, and the men moved a fast 1,500 yards in the Malayan dusk. They took their positions, received the signal, and opened fire.

The ambush killed a member of the District Committee and one of the branch committee, and caused four more guerrillas to surrender soon after. The surrenders, which

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In turn were bound to have their consequences, may suggest the impact of the loss of the [unclear] the death of a fairly senior party member, and of the realization that the Security Forces could discover the terrorists' plans.<sup>34</sup>

Division of effort between battalions was illustrated in the same area of Johore, in Rensam, where the Rhodesia worked in the jungle and the Queen's Royal Regiment in estates and on the fringe. In the fall of 1955, the then Director of Operations, General Sir Geoffrey Bourne, found that the local guerrillas had flouted an amnesty offer and so ordered a concentration against them. The Queen's was given five new villages (that is, villages inhabited by resettled squatters) and many [unclear] with jungle patches between them. Dull work, though the men of the Queen's, with long patrols through estates from before dawn until after dark, perpetual checking of workers and villages, and searching of vehicles and houses for surplus and hence illegal, food. The soldiers searched workers, both on the estates and when they left

<sup>34</sup>Mal. M. A. [unclear], "Operation PETAER," [unclear] Infantry [unclear] January 1957, CONFIDENTIAL. The significance of surrenders is discussed in R. Sunderland, "Antiguerrilla Intelligence in Malaya, 1948-1960" (U). The RAND Corporation, RM 6172-ISA, September 1966, SECRET.

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their houses in the morning, and helped food-control officers in house-to-house searches for food, thereby keeping needed food from the guerrillas and also putting inhibiting pressure on the links between the guerrillas in the jungle and the Min Yuan. This work, dull and tedious though it was, put its mark on the Bengas guerrillas, who, at the last extremity, tried to live on oil-palm nuts and young tree branches.<sup>55</sup>

If the Security Forces were getting better results in 1953 than they had in 1949, this was not due solely to greater skill in jungle life and better marksmanship, it was also the consequence of their having developed and perfected the methods described above. Whenever they allowed themselves to go back to the methods of 1949, they got the results of 1949. Thus, in late 1953, a patrol of the 2/6 Gurkhas killed the bodyguard of Ah Ho, the Secretary of the Communist Party in Nagri Beablian State and a most important figure in the party hierarchy. The Gurkha brigade commander fell into the

<sup>55</sup> Journal of the Queen's Royal Regiment, November 1956, p. 57, Major R.C.G. Foster, MC, History of the Queen's Royal Regiment, Vol. 4, Gale and Polden Ltd., Aldershot, p. 18.

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error of exploiting this success along the lines of warfare of other places and times by pouring in troops for quick results. He reinforced the 2/6 Gurkhas with three companies from the 1/7 Gurkhas. The latter earned a line of ambushes, while the 2/6 swept the area of the kill to the line of ambushes. The results were two contacts, one kill. Ah Mo was not eliminated until three years later, after a major food-denial operation that ran from one year or into the next. With him went sixty-seven other guerrillas and the greater part of the local Min Yuen.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup>"Diary of Daily Events," 1/7 Gurkha Rifles, November 1953 - December 1955, SLCAEL; Federation Report, 1956, p. 448.

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### V. MOVEMENT IN JUNGLE WAR

That the Commonwealth forces in Malaya could hold off the Communists while learning what kinds of jungle operations were effective implied an ability on their part to operate efficiently in the jungle. It meant that they knew how to move, live, and fight miles away from roads, trails, or tracks.

To have solved the problem of jungle movement and learned to move task forces of any desired size through the jungle is a skill fundamental to success in jungle war. If one may judge by Bernard B. Fall's Street Without Joy, the French army in Vietnam never even thought to learn the art; for example, Fall describes its attempt, as late as 1954, to defend a mountain plateau containing many heavily wooded areas with a motorized task force reinforced with tanks and armored artillery. The task force, being roadbound, met its end in a series of ambushes along the roads it used on one futile mission after another.<sup>57</sup> The British army of 1948-1960 had a very different approach. In World War II, its commanders had

<sup>57</sup> Bernard B. Fall, Street Without Joy, The Stackpole Co., Harrisburg, Pa., 1961, Chapter 4, "End of a Task Force"; for comments by Marshall Andrews see ibid., p. 11.

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tried to use roadbound task forces in jungle war against the Japanese in Burma. The resulting series of costly ambushes and infiltrations had taught them that jungle war was primarily the task of the infantryman who avoided roads and trails as he moved through the jungle.

As another, most vivid example of what awaited the roadbound formation in jungle war the British recalled the Japanese attack on the 17th Indian Division as it was beginning to cross the Sittang River bridge in lower Burma in February 1942. The Japanese had picked up a radio message in clear and knew that the division would retreat across the swift and unforgiving river. They therefore moved two regiments through the jungle and aimed them directly at the bridge. The Indian Division's movements were slow; they had to conform to the road, and were further handicapped by an accident on the bridge that backed up two columns of trucks for a mile. The Japanese attacked straight out of the jungle at the bridgehead and they also put a roadblock between two battalions along the line of march, and fighting developed at these points. As the day wore on, more and more Japanese attacks opened on the division as it was strung out along the road. In the confusion, the bridge was

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blown up prematurely. When the remnants of the 17th were counted, there were only 80 officers and 3,404 enlisted men, about 41 per cent of the total authorized strength. Most of the transport, some of the artillery, and the greater part of the equipment were gone. The division was for the time being not a fighting force. The Japanese had begun to move on foot through the jungle about the same time that the 17th had begun to move by road. They reached the bridge in fifty-six hours of crosscountry marching, as quickly as did the division with its motor transport.<sup>58</sup>

The experience of the 17th Indian Division at the Sittang bridge was repeated several times in 1942 and 1943. British and Indian formations moved up and down roads. Whether attacking or defending, battalions and brigades either were strung out at short distances from these roads or were actually on them, leaving the Japanese free to hook past and block them. "The best answer would have been to do the same to the Japanese before they did it to us," later wrote Field Marshal the Viscount Slim,

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<sup>58</sup>Kirby et al., The War Against Japan, Vol. II: India's Most Dangerous Hour, 1958, Chapter 4.

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"but we, by reason of our complete dependence on motor transport and the unhandiness of our troops in the jungle, could not carry out these hooks successfully in any strength."<sup>59</sup>

By 1945 the British had learned how to move through the jungle and had freed their forces from the tyranny of the road. The type of jungle war that this permitted them to fight is tersely described by Slim. After commenting on the importance of air transport and of wide latitude for subordinate commanders, he noted these characteristics:

....

(iii) The operation, over wide distances in most difficult country, of comparatively small forces in tactical independence but strategic combination.

(iv) Reduced scales of transport and equipment, supplemented by ingenuity and improvisation from local resources.

(v) The high quality of the individual soldier, his morale, toughness, and discipline, his acceptance of hardship, and his ability to move on his own feet and to look after himself.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>59</sup>Slim, Defeat into Victory, p. 9.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., p. 458. See also p. 449 for Slim's comments on vehicles. It was his experience in Southeast Asia that

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In Malaya, troop movement might be divided into the tactical and the administrative. The former took place when the enemy was being sought by the troops involved; the latter, when the enemy might attack. All movement on operations was tactical.

As regards movement of troops and supplies in rear areas, it was possible, given the nature of the Emergency, to establish that certain roads offered little danger of guerrilla ambush, and on these, as will be seen, protection was minimal. On other roads, escorts were provided and men traveled in formed units that were trained and organized to execute immediate-action antiambush drills. However, the basic protection for traffic in the rear was the steady pressure kept on the guerrillas by troops moving through the jungle.

Crosscountry movement in jungle is movement by small units, for companies and platoons are, in Slim's phrase, "the basic units of the jungle," marching and fighting "in tactical independence but strategic combination."<sup>61</sup>

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the fewer vehicles a unit had, the farther and faster it could move, that is, that tactical mobility and number of vehicles were in inverse ratio. He argues that this fact was masked in Europe and North Africa during World War II by the weakness of hostile air power and the large number of motorable routes.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., pp. 451, 458.

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### THE BASIC IMPORTANCE OF SILENCE

The authoritative British manual The Conduct of Anti-Terrorist Operations in Malaya states that movement is, first of all, silent, and that speed takes second place to silence. The emphasis on silence limits speed sharply and means that movement will often be "painfully slow."<sup>62</sup> Because of the importance of silence, Commonwealth units were ordered to cut or chop vegetation only as a last resort to avoid excessive detours. (The spectacle, and especially the sound, of a unit chopping its way through the jungle to arrive at a rendezvous within a second of the appointed time would have been dangerous as well as incongruous in operations against a foe who had acquired the senses and sensitivities of wild game and who measured time, not by the second-hand of a fine watch, but by the moon.) Moreover, the phrase "last resort to save excessive detours" should be read in context; as the manual went on to point out, experience had shown that a search usually found a way around the bad patch, whereas cutting slow movement, tired the troops, and with the attendant noise betrayed the unit to its enemies.

<sup>62</sup>Director of Operations, Malaya, The Conduct of Anti-Terrorist Operations in Malaya, 3rd ed., 1958 (hereafter, ATOM), p. VIII-3, CONFIDENTIAL.

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In addition to the importance of silence, training and doctrine emphasized that tracks and roads were to be avoided because of the danger of ambush. When the Security Forces used a track, they were simplifying the guerrilla's continual search for opportunities to ambush them.

Moving slowly, off the road, and stopping frequently (at least every ten minutes) to listen for the enemy, units also were instructed to leave no trail. Garbage and litter were to be buried and twigs left unbroken, and the last man was to sweep away signs of passage.

Halts were a matter for the experienced judgment of the commander, normally a function of the terrain and the condition of his men. At the beginning of a march, the normal ten minutes' halt after the first hour was observed. Thereafter, the commander stopped as seemed appropriate to him. At every halt, positions were taken for all-round defense; each man listened intently at the beginning and again at the end of the halt.

This slow, silent crosscountry movement generally continued until about 1600 hours, when, at a silent signal, the unit would move off at right angles to its course for perhaps 100 yards. Then, at another signal and a wave of the leader's arm to indicate the long axis of the

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perimeter, the unit would go through the drill of establishing camp for the night.<sup>63</sup>

How far could a unit move in a day? Allowing for a normal proportion of good and bad going in hilly jungle, the Coldstream Guards found that the daily average was four to five thousand yards as the crow flies, and the actual yardage traveled might be considerably more. In very bad terrain, the Coldstream found themselves covering as little as fifteen hundred yards.<sup>64</sup>

As for night movement in jungle, ATOM said only that it was "not often practical" and should be undertaken only by well-trained troops. An earlier, very similar statement by the Jungle Training Center said that such movement was possible provided it was parallel to a track, to a point not too far from the road, and on a moonlit night. Ability to use map and compass at night was regarded as essential for movement in cultivation of any sort.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>63</sup>The foregoing information is based on ATOM, Chapters VI and VIII.

<sup>64</sup>Appendix A to "Quarterly Historical Report," 2 Coldstream Guards, June 30, 1949, SECRET.

<sup>65</sup>"Minutes, Commanders' Conference, FARELF, 25-26 April 1949," Annex to "Quarterly Historical Report," FARELF G(Ops/SD) Branch, for quarter ending June 30, 1949 (hereafter, "Commanders' Conference, 25-26 April 1949"), SECRET.

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### NO COUNTRY TOO ROUGH

An example of what Commonwealth troops could do in the way of crosscountry movement was Operation BORROWDALE. This involved three rifle companies of Seaforth Highlanders and a company of Gurkhas. The goal of the operation was the Tasek Bera area, which the communist guerrillas had once described as having but one approach, and that one impossible for Europeans.<sup>66</sup>

Four self-contained task forces were sent to the Tasek Bera area to stay and dominate it. At first, rubber boats were air-dropped for use on some river stretches. Once the troops had won the friendship of the aborigines, these provided more suitable craft. Soldiers carried 70-80lb packs. In the six weeks that Operation BORROWDALE lasted, the troops reached and occupied the area, destroyed nineteen camps (mostly transient), and achieved three contacts, three kills, one surrender, and one capture. The carrier platoon of the Seaforths (Bren-gun carriers, not porters) spent fifty-two days in the jungle, during which they covered more than 300 miles of rough country. Notably, there was virtually no sickness in BORROWDALE.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>66</sup>This comment was made to Col. J. Spencer Chapman and is reported by him in his The Jungle Is Neutral, Chatto and Windus, London, 1949, p. 194.

<sup>67</sup>Appendix A to "Quarterly Historical Report," Seaforths, June 30, 1949, SECRET.

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VEHICLE MOVEMENT

The problem of secure movement by road is the subject of fourteen tightly-written pages in The Conduct of Anti-Terrorist Operations in Malaya. To attempt to summarize what has already been so reduced would be dangerous; any soldier who may have to deal with the problem should read those pages in their entirety. It might be well, however, to single out points of interest to the general student, and to discuss a few others, not covered in the basic text of the manual, which one brigade in Malaya, the 28th Commonwealth, incorporated in its standard operating procedures.

Basically, there were two ways of protecting movement in the rear areas of Malaya: (1) by fragmenting the guerrillas into groups so small that their ambushes could be met with a very fair chance of success; and (2) by such aggressive patrolling and intelligence-gathering that the guerrillas would find it most difficult and dangerous to mass.

The second protection for vehicles in the rear was strict security. Every effort was made to keep movements secret. Planning and orders were classified information, issued on a need-to-know basis and as late as possible.

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The third protection was good administration. The convoy commander was briefed in advance as to what security forces he would encounter when and where, if at all. Anything unexpected, therefore, could only be hostile.

The fourth protection was partly showmanship. Convoys and vehicles were rendered recognizable as hard targets too dangerous for the sensible guerrilla to attack, and uniforms and the general bearing of the troops were carefully watched because of their effect on enemy morale. Also, vehicles traveling in convoy were so spaced as to be mutually supporting without falling within the same zone of fire.

If these defenses failed, the Commonwealth forces taught their troops and the police that the guerrilla ambush was an opportunity to close with and to destroy an elusive enemy. This, of course, was consistent with the basic theme of the offensive that marked the conduct of the entire campaign. Every man in the group knew his place and role in an immediate-action drill, whose aim was to bring men into action and to launch an immediate attack aimed at the flanks of the guerrilla firing position.

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In keeping with the principle of economy of force, the authorities in Malaya classified roads according to the hazard that each presented. Since they did not recognize anything less than the highest degree of readiness for action, having found distinctions of degree unworkable, they in turn limited the requirement for it to areas of greater potential danger. There were, therefore, unrestricted roads, white roads, and black roads. The unrestricted lay within the limits of major towns and wherever else the responsible headquarters felt convinced of the troops' safety from the guerrillas. On them, troops could travel unarmed, in civilian clothes, and in any vehicle. On the white roads, which included most major trunk roads as well as those of the other roads on which there was little probability of ambush, men and vehicles might travel singly but had to be armed; that is to say, a military vehicle would always have at least one armed man besides the driver. On the black roads, in general, anything that moved had to be ready to counter ambush attempts.

Dealing with the particular problems of safe movement on roads, the 28th Commonwealth Brigade ordered that machine guns not be mounted on the roofs of vehicle cabs.

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Experience had shown that in that position the gun and its operator were good targets, and that the gun could not be depressed sufficiently to hit many roadside targets. The sentries, who were present in all vehicles, had the mission of opening fire at once on ambush positions and covering the evacuation of the vehicle; they were not there to give the alarm, for it was assumed that the guerrillas would be artfully hidden until they opened fire.

When vehicles halted on black roads, all occupants dismounted. At least one man from every vehicle, and two if possible, moved to nearby tactical positions. When a vehicle broke down, the convoy halted and a report was passed to the convoy commander. If the repair could be made on the spot and in a short time, one or more vehicles with an escort would be detached to stand by until it was done. If a wrecker was needed, the commander would have an adequate party stand by until it came. In some cases, towing was acceptable.

The 28th Commonwealth Brigade thought that for the convoy commander a completely open Land Rover was the safest vehicle. On a return trip, if he could not bring his convoy back by a different route, the commander

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might change the position of his vehicle in the  
convoy.<sup>68</sup>

### THE PROBLEM OF A RELIEF COLUMN

Acceptance of the fact that tactical movement of the Commonwealth forces was slow raised the question of the relief column, should the guerrillas attack a police jungle fort, a village of resettled squatters, or a police post. The absence of static army units passively awaiting attack had eliminated a whole series of possible occasions calling for relief operations, leaving only the three eventualities just mentioned.

The main protection of the police jungle fort was its very nature: it was a base for offensive patrolling by its garrison, which in turn had a radio link with the outside. The garrison knew what was stirring in the jungle, because it patrolled offensively every day and cultivated the friendship of the aborigines. Thus, it could discover at a distance any guerrilla force too large for it to handle, and could relay the information to the infantry battalion that had been ordered to be ready for a relief mission and had planned and trained for an assault

<sup>68</sup>"Operational Standing Orders for the Emergency" in "Commander's Diary," 28 Commonwealth Brigade, March 1960, SECRET.

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air landing. No jungle fort appears to have been attacked in Malaya, probably because continual jungle war had so fragmented the guerrillas that they could not mass a force able to overrun a jungle fort, let alone cope with an airlifted battalion.

With the exception of the jungle forts, there were no installations in the jungle for the guerrillas to attack. Patrol bases, though many, were hidden and were shifted every few days. If the guerrillas had discovered one, their reaction time would not have been fast enough for a planned attack. Such bases were in danger only if a guerrilla force blundered onto one. Only a few were ever attacked.<sup>69</sup>

Police posts near the jungle fringe were occasionally overrun, but company bases were targets too difficult for the guerrillas. The forces likely to be involved in guerrilla attacks on police posts, though limited in size as a result of the government forces' aggressive patrolling, were nevertheless regarded by the terrorists as adequate for their mission. Therefore, the battalion charged with support of a police post, being fully aware that an attack might be bait for an ambush, would have the men and

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<sup>69</sup>ATOM, p. VI-4.

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vehicles necessary to create a motorized task force that could cope with any ambush the guerrillas were likely to mount. It will be recalled that police posts were not in the jungle but near its fringe, so that a relief column would have to move through cultivation. Relief operations were thoroughly planned and many times rehearsed. Route reconnaissance would spot likely ambush sites. In a real incident, the relief convoy would halt on approaching them, and men who had already gone over the ground several times in rehearsal would quickly sweep it. There was also the practice of prophylactic fire, that is, of machine-gunning likely ambush spots as they were approached. These same tactics would have been used in the relief of "new" villages, had it not been for the guerrillas' decision not to attack these.

But the matter of countering guerrilla assaults on police posts and villages did not stop with the dispatch of relief columns. Since areas of possible interest had been thoroughly reconnoitered by patrols that had worked them through year after year, likely withdrawal routes of the guerrillas had been spotted, and every attempt was made to set ambushes on them.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>70</sup>Plans to relieve Fort Chabai are described in the Operations Instruction, "Commander's Diary," 1/3 A. Anglian,

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The experience of the Royal Hampshires in the Bentong area illustrates the point. Between March 23 and December 1, 1954, "all rifle companies were out in the jungle, a minimum of 130 days out of 277." They received sixty-eight airdrops and had numerous food-carrying parties for silent resupply, and six company-size operations were mounted by helicopter. During this period, twenty-five guerrillas were eliminated. As a result of this pressure, the guerrillas staged no incidents in Bentong.<sup>71</sup> It is such pressure, rather than relief columns, that protected police posts and company bases.

Though the ability to move through the jungle was a skill of fundamental importance to success in jungle war, jungle movement had to be purposeful, and fitted into a larger context. On the great majority of occasions, patrolling was that larger context.

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May 31, 1960, SECRET; 2d Battalion, Scots Guards, Malaya, 1948-1951, Erskine Camp, Kuala Kubu Bharu, March 7, 1951 (hereafter, Scots Guards), p. 31, SECRET.

<sup>71</sup>The Royal Hampshire Regiment Journal, February 1955, p. 10.

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### VI. PATROLLING

The aim of patrolling was to locate the guerrillas, yet not to reveal the location of the patrol until a commander, either the patrol leader or the next higher echelon, had decided when, where, and how to attack them. If this aim could not be achieved, then the next best course was to kill guerrillas as opportunity permitted, or to report back any information that might lead to their elimination later on.<sup>72</sup>

Patrols normally operated out of platoon or company bases set up in the jungle. These bases were of two types, the tactical and the patrol base. The tactical base was set up to be occupied for protracted periods, had comfortable bashes, and could be resupplied. From it, parties regularly went out on patrol or ambush missions. The patrol base was a temporary one, never to be occupied for more than forty-eight hours, and ideally for no more than twenty-four. Both kinds of bases depended primarily on concealment for their protection.<sup>73</sup>

To reach base sites in deep jungle, troops were flown in by helicopter or moved on foot.

<sup>72</sup>Bapt, Sign SOP, Malaya (Anti-Terrorist), Part I: Patrolling, in Commander's Diary, 1/3 E. Anglian, December 20, 1959 - January 31, 1960, SECRET.  
<sup>73</sup>ATOM, p. VI-1.

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### PREPARING TO PATROL

All patrol missions were based on a precise plan. The company commander assigned each platoon to a specific area. He also issued an operations order which sought to coordinate the over-all patrol effort so that no area was left unsearched and patrols did not clash by accident. The order followed the American five-paragraph form. Its third paragraph gave the plan in outline, with routes in and out of the jungle, the length of the operation, methods of search, and deception arrangements. Resupply and evacuation were described.

On this basis the platoon leader then prepared a plan of his own. From a map reconnaissance he chose a series of platoon base positions and decided the order in which each map square would be covered. As he did so, he kept in mind that, generally speaking, a platoon could search a grid square in one day and that it would need about an hour to move through 1,000 yards of primary jungle or through 200-400 yards of swamp or secondary growth. He would prepare to send out from each base five or six small patrols a day to search the area on azimuths diverging by about 100.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>74</sup>Patrols varied in size from relatively large fighting units down to small reconnaissance. The Australians

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The platoon leader then briefed his men, probably before the map in the company operations room. On returning to their huts, the soldiers prepared themselves, their rations, and their equipment. Issue canned goods supplemented by onions, rice, and curry powder went into haversacks, machetes were sharpened, and weapons tested. The signalers arranged with friends to share the load of the radio equipment.

In a normal patrol operation, which did not involve helicopters, trucks carried the platoon to the edge of a rubber plantation in the dark hours before dawn. There the men slipped out of the trucks and silently disappeared into the shadows between the trees. Every precaution -- night, silence, security measures, cover, and deception -- was used to get the Commonwealth forces into the jungle without being seen and thus preserve the advantage of surprise.<sup>75</sup>

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never used anything smaller than a three-man patrol. The 1/3 E. Anglian put the minimum at four men, on the grounds that the guerrillas regarded three as a soft target (Maj. R. S. Garland, MC, "Operations in Malaya," The Australian Army Journal, April 1959 (hereafter, "Operations in Malaya"); "Battalion SOP...Patrolling," 1/3 E. Anglian.

<sup>75</sup>The Somersets, pp. 37-39.

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While moving, the platoon was deployed into its two or three sections, each of which in turn broke down into three groups: reconnaissance (two scouts and group commander); support (the Bren gun and its crew); and rifle (two riflemen and group commander). The typical patrol here described, as it moved through a rubber plantation, had its three groups in triangular patterns: scout group up and rifle and support back, or scout and rifle up with support back. Luminous patches on the men's backs helped them maintain contact.<sup>76</sup>

Dawn in Malaya always came at about 6:30 a.m. In the first hour thereafter, the platoon moved about 400 yards through the plantation. Then it halted for a break. Some of the men removed leeches; others took salt tablets. Positions were taken for all-round defense. From about 1954 on, sucking was forbidden, lest a guerrilla pick up the smell and the men dull their own senses. This rule reflects the steadily growing finesse of the antiguerrilla operation.

When they had left plantation for jungle, platoons shifted into single file, group following group within sections, sections following on each other. Now, the

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<sup>76</sup>ATOM, Chapter VIII, Appendixes B & C.

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order within sections was to have the reconnaissance group first, then the support group, and finally the rifle group. The individual men were so spaced out as to have rarely less than five yards between them. Movement was slow, broken by frequent halts to listen for noise of guerrilla activity. The best times for picking up such noise were the early morning and late afternoon, when there would be the most activity in a guerrilla camp. But at any time of day the golden rules were: silence and observation.

Men learned to pick up the scent of tobacco smoke, of cooking, and of woodsmoke. Streams were watched for traces of soap and fats, the ground was scanned for tracks, and the undergrowth for other signs that someone had passed through it. But sound remained as good an indicator that guerrillas were near as all the ground evidence put together: "The biggest giveaway of the communist terrorists is the noise of cutting and, as they use wood fuel for cooking they must cut fairly often."<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>77</sup>Quoted from ATOM, p. VIII-5. See also Appendixes B & C for information on patrol formations; pp. VIII-4/5 for directions on what to observe on patrol; The Somersets, pp. 37-39, and Maj. J. B. Oldfield, The Green Howards in Malaya, 1949-1952, Gale and Polder, Ltd., Aldershot, 1953, p. 50.

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### SETTING UP A BASE

Let us assume here that the troops' first day passed uneventfully, as most days did in Malaya, and that the platoon was steadily nearing the area in which it intended to set up its first base. Let us also, for the moment, suppose that the platoon we have been following was a particular one, from the Royal Hampshire Regiment, that was operating in the Semenyih area in 1956. As the day wore on, it moved for an hour along a stream on whose bank it intended to set up base, part of the time in thick secondary jungle, part of the time parallel to a logging track. Then the platoon leader found what he thought an ideal site, a small area of flat ground through which ran both the main stream and the tributary. This gave clear flowing water about 18 inches deep, flat space to either side of the stream, and enough big trees properly spaced for slinging hammocks. Nearby hills helped to deaden sound and hide flashes of light. As soon as the officer had made his choice, a small patrol detached itself to circle the site for close-in security, while the section leaders drew lots to divide the perimeter among them. (Normally, the base site would be about 100 yards off the line of march, so that any guerrillas following the

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platoon or patrol would lose the track in the gathering dark.)

Then came the order to "bash up." Each section put out a sentry, while the rest concentrated on slinging hammocks and cooking curry. An area free of roots and undergrowth had to be cleared for every man. This was done by sawing, for chopping was not permitted. There was no cutting of vegetation away from the base. This initial drill took ten to fifteen minutes. In cooking, the men worked in pairs, for two men could dine relatively well by pooling their rations.

The perimeter was circled by a series of long vines so arranged that men could find their way about at night. Within the perimeter, additional vines were strung to show the way to water hole, sentry post, and latrines. As night began to gather, the men stood-to, each taking the post he would occupy in case of an attack, his weapons ready, and listening for hostile noise. Malaria pills were taken, weapons inspected, and every man took note of where he was in relation to his neighbors and what would be his field of fire. Stand-to was also a security measure to guard against being attacked and overrun in the half-light. Night fell quickly in Malaya, and the dark lasted about twelve hours.

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At dawn, there was another stand-to and another check of weapons and positions. Then came a hearty breakfast, so that the men would be fit to march, and if need be fight. For the Hampshires in 1956, it was a meal of oatmeal cakes, beans and bacon, and tea. Then the patrols slipped out, leaving behind in the base one man from each section and the radioman, and usually also the platoon leader who maintained command and control.<sup>78</sup>

In describing the organization and administration of a base, the official manual stressed the need for as much comfort as ingenuity and local resources permitted. It pointed out that a badly-administered base meant bad patrolling by tired soldiers.<sup>79</sup>

The patrols for the day were lightly equipped and, in average jungle, could expect to move about 4,000 yards before they had to reverse course to get back to base by 1600 hours. This early return time permitted them to do their housekeeping and cooking before nightfall, at about 1830, and it precluded any possible confusion between

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<sup>78</sup> Lt. Bretheron, "The Platoon Base," The Royal Hampshire Journal, November 1956. After the first week, every one in the particular base described by Lt. Bretheron had his own basha with table and chair of wood and bamboo, and damming the stream had provided a swimming pool. The Somersets, pp. 37-39, is the source of the information on the time needed to bash up.

<sup>79</sup> AFOM, Chapter VI.

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friend and foe, as anyone approaching in the dark would be known to be hostile.<sup>80</sup>

As they moved through the jungle on compass bearings, their senses keen at all times for smoke, voices, and woodchopping, and pausing every ten minutes to listen with extra care, the men of a patrol never knew from minute to minute when one of them might hear or see the guerrillas. When a patrol did spot the enemy, the men slowly and carefully stalked into position, and the patrol leader had to decide whether to signal them to attack or to return to base, where he would report the matter to the company commander and possibly to higher echelons.

### PATROLS IN ACTION

There was also a very good chance that patrol and guerrillas would see one another almost simultaneously. For this situation, as for the patrol leader's decision to attack any unsuspecting guerrillas, the answer was the immediate-action drill. Experience had taught that, once contact was made, there was no time for the leader to gather his subordinates, sketch the situation and issue orders. Every second counted and had to be used.

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<sup>80</sup>

The Fomersetts, pp. 37-39.

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Therefore, four immediate-action drills were taught and endlessly rehearsed. The analogy of the football play may be helpful here, but the IA drill was even faster, an instant response to one signal.

The skill that patrols could attain was demonstrated in 1958 during Operation GINGER, which included thirty-two contacts between soldiers and guerrillas. On twenty-five of those thirty-two occasions, the soldiers saw the guerrillas first; on only seven did the guerrillas see first. On the twenty-five occasions when they saw first, the soldiers killed twenty-one guerrillas and captured two; out of their seven chances, the guerrillas killed two soldiers. The record in regard to ambushes is even more one-sided. The soldiers sprung nine ambushes, killing a total of twelve guerrillas, and only one ambush was a failure. The guerrillas did not succeed in springing a single ambush.<sup>81</sup>

Because contacts were measured in seconds and in the latter years of the Emergency were very few, marksmanship took on added importance. To become an expert marksman requires long hours of training and practice, for soldiers

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<sup>81</sup>Operation GINGER in "Commander's Diary," 28 Commonwealth Brigade, 1958, SECRET.

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as for anyone else. Early experience in Malaya showed that a high standard of marksmanship by the infantryman could not be taken for granted, and that it would take much planning and training to be able to field a patrol of men each of whom could get off a lethal shot in two or three seconds. Men therefore trained constantly on jungle lane and ambush range. In the former, they moved down a winding lane along which targets popped up and disappeared. On the latter, targets appeared suddenly and without warning, to be fired at by the soldier who had been lying in wait, and then disappeared with equal speed. Also, as a matter of routine over and above the battalion training program, the soldier had his weapon inspected and zeroed at the end of every patrol. When he fired it on the Malayan Range, which tested his ability at snapshooting. In at least one battalion, the man who did not qualify as a marksman when he came off patrol, though his reason for failure may only have been fatigue, could not go out on patrol again. In this situation, social pressure from his mates could be relied on to keep the soldier up to standard.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>82</sup>ATOM, pp. XV-2/3; interview with Col. White.

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The first drill was called, simply and aptly, "freezing." It was used when the patrol saw the guerrillas without being seen by them, almost always in a situation where the two parties were approaching each other. The lead scout would silently signal "Freeze!" with an arm-and-hand signal, and each man would halt in the aiming position. The patrol leader would open fire when he thought best. If the two parties were approaching on the same course, the lead scout would signal "Freeze!" and move to the nearest cover, either left or right. The patrol would imitate him, always moving parallel to him. As many guerrillas as possible were then allowed into the killing zone, after which the patrol leader would begin the firing.

If guerrillas and patrol saw one another simultaneously, the drill was "Immediate assault!" and success went to the quicker reactions and better marksmen. The action most often began with the first member of the patrol to appreciate the situation firing at the guerrillas and shouting "CT front [or right or left] charge!" The patrol instantly deployed, each man's route into line having been run through time and again. An immediate frontal assault followed, whose distance was controlled by the leader.

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The third drill was the assault on a guerrilla camp. If the camp was found by "unexpected contact as opposed to reconnaissance," whoever saw it would shout "CI camp!" The patrol leader would shout "Charge!" and the frontal assault would begin. Almost always the guerrillas would try to scatter like quail, and the survivors would be pursued until contact was lost.

Last of all was the counterambush drill, whose basic theme was an encircling attack using fire and movement. The drill had two variants, one if only the leading element of the patrol was caught, and one if the whole patrol was ambushed in open ground. Normally, the guerrillas sought to occupy high ground from which to fire down on a patrol. Therefore, as the patrol moved, its leader was constantly aware of the terrain through which it was passing and was prepared, if any part of the column was fired upon, to command "Encircling attack [right or left]!" The men were so spaced as to make it hard for the guerrillas to ambush the whole patrol. If this did nevertheless happen, then the patrol was under no circumstances to seek cover and from there enter upon a fire fight. Rather, the survivors were immediately to move and attack the guerrilla positions. Both the encircling

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attack and the immediate assault exploited the fact that the guerrillas aimed for cheap and certain victory and were correspondingly sensitive to threats against their flanks and rear. Thus, the patrol that reacted with an immediate assault suggested to them that it might well be the advance guard of a larger force.<sup>83</sup>

An incident illustrating immediate-action drill in combat occurred on November 5, 1960, when Major E.I.L. Mostyn with another officer and six enlisted men of the Scots Guards picked up chopping noises during one of his patrol's listening halts. The patrol at once silently stalked the noise. Some yards farther on, the lead scout signaled "Halt!" and then lifted his rifle and fired. The patrol immediately formed into line and moved forward, firing. So, too, did the guerrillas, and at less than 20 yards there was a brisk fire fight, which resulted in three guerrillas killed and one captured. The Guards took professional interest in the fact that not one spoken order was issued during the action.<sup>84</sup>

### PATROLLING ON MOUNT OPHIR

How all these techniques meshed together was demonstrated by a platoon of the Queen's Regiment on Mount

<sup>83</sup>ATOM, Chapter X.

<sup>84</sup>Scots Guards, pp. 6-7.

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Ophir, about half-way between Malacca and Segamat. In June 1954 the Queen's sent the patrol out for a routine search of an area of the mountain characterized by mountain streams, steep valleys, vertical rock faces, and generally very difficult terrain.

The soldiers left camp at 0300 hours, and were well inside the jungle by first light, at 0600. That night they set up base in a valley 2,300 feet above sea level. Soon afterward, the local security patrol reported in great excitement that its men had spotted signs of shoots having been cut from a thorny bush for use as food, and, almost simultaneously, an SER guide who was with the rest of the platoon noticed the same sort of thing. It was clear that the platoon had set up base near a guerrilla camp.

Sure that they were within striking distance, the bulk of the platoon set off the next morning, leaving behind a heavy guard of six. The plan was to move down to the nearest stream. If they found tracks near it, they would follow these in a single group of fourteen soldiers. If not, they would split up and work both up- and down-stream.

On finding a track, the soldiers moved in a body "very cautiously for about two hours parallel to the track

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in the hope that we would get into the camp without being spotted by the sentry." In these two hours, they moved 300 yards. They eventually found two unoccupied guerrilla camps, 20 yards apart. As they were searching the second, noise indicated that unsuspecting guerrillas had returned to the first. One soldier saw a guerrilla pop up from behind a rock and killed him. Another guerrilla was injured, and later killed in the pursuit. Inspection of the bodies proved one of the victims to have been a state committee member with many documents on him. These revealed, ironically, that he had been sent by communist higher authority to revitalize the district, and had just arrived.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Journal of the Queen's Royal Regiment, November 1954, p. 181.

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### VII. JUNGLECRAFT

"There is nothing about this that white troops cannot learn," the commander of the 2d Battalion of the Coldstream Guards reported after some months of operations in the jungle of Malaya, and the experience of other battalions there supported him. As good a test as any of the British soldier's ability to acquire junglecraft is the surprise attack on a guerrilla camp. Although one often-cited article flatly stated in 1949 that the Security Forces had never yet "been able to effect a complete surprise on a bandit camp in the jungle" and asserted that any move into the jungle would be signaled by the guerrillas' spies or spotted by their sentries and that preliminary reconnaissance was not feasible,<sup>86</sup> the records of the campaign in the early days showed so many successful surprise attacks on occupied camps that it became too tedious to list them. In July and August of 1948 alone, there were seven successful attacks on occupied camps and a total of twenty-one guerrillas were killed, wounded, or captured in them.<sup>87</sup>

<sup>86</sup>B.N.R., "The Campaign in Malaya," World Today, London, November 1949.

<sup>87</sup>Weekly ISUMs, North Malaya Sub-District, for dates shown, SECRET.

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An even clearer indication that the Commonwealth troops had quickly learned to operate effectively in the jungle and that they were at home in it was the coup of the 26th Field Regiment, FA, near Batu Arang. Operating as infantry, the gunners, with police attached, surprised a communist camp at first light on July 30, 1948, killing twenty-two guerrillas and capturing eighteen.<sup>88</sup>

The ability to conduct at will large and small jungle operations proved that Commonwealth forces could move and patrol in the jungle. This, in turn, presupposed their knowing how to keep healthy, well-fed, and alert in the jungle and to find out what was happening near-by before walking onto the scene. This last skill, tracking, is perhaps the most vivid evidence of acclimatization, for one can ask no better proof that men are at home in the jungle than that they can follow and find others who are determined to avoid them.

### TRACKING

Forced as they are to move on foot, guerrillas cannot avoid leaving traces of their passage through the jungle.

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<sup>88</sup>SITREP No. 16, radio FARELF to War Office, No. 13606 60, August 6, 1948, SECRET.

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In Malaya, the Commonwealth forces learned to watch for these signs, inconsistent with the normal pattern:

- (a) Change in the color or the vegetation
- (b) Unnatural formations in the vegetation
- (c) Bruises, breaks, and cuts in the vegetation
- (d) Water on certain areas whereas the remainder is dry
- (e) Lack of water or dew on vegetation
- (f) Mud or soil on grass or bushes
- (g) Scars (or footprints) in bare or muddy ground
- (h) Latex exuded from a bruised rubber root
- (i) Disturbances in insect life<sup>89</sup>

By 1953, Gurkha battalions had learned to spot these signs and draw the necessary conclusions. In 1954, Malay battalions were training every man to track. British and certain Commonwealth battalions made use of Iban trackers from Sarawak State in Borneo, who served on a contract basis. However, experience showed that a carefully selected British volunteer, especially if he had been raised in rural country, could become a competent tracker in two months, and could maintain and perfect his skill through daily practice thereafter.<sup>90</sup>

<sup>89</sup>ATOM, p. XXI-2.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid. p. 1; Oldfield, *The Green Howards*, pp. xxi-xxii; "1954 Retraining," 2d Battalion, the Malaya Regiment, ID 1284827, SECRET; BORS/FE, Memo No. 1/57, COI IDENTICAL.

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One battalion, of the 3d East Anglian Regiment, decided against issuing fixed rules to be followed upon discovery of a track, preferring to have the patrol leader make his appreciation on the spot. When the track seemed less than forty-eight hours old, the patrol normally returned to base at once and reported the track to the battalion command post by radio. The usual reaction then was ambush or pursuit (or both) by groups drawn from the base. A tracker team would be sent out from battalion to take over from the patrol group that had begun the tracking.

This same battalion wrote that, from location and other evidence, one could sometimes deduce the purpose of the guerrillas who had made the track. For example, guerrillas bearing loads and moving inward from the jungle edge would be a food lift returning to camp, and, as a rule, it was advisable to follow any heavy footprints leading into the jungle, for they might lead to a camp. Fresh prints not more than 150 yards inside the jungle edge might be worth ambushing. The leader would have to check such evidence against local guerrilla practices and then decide whether to arrange an ambush and, if so, for when.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Battalion SOP...Patrolling," 1/3 E. Anglian.

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Trackers, of whatever origin, together with dogs and their handlers, made up the tracker teams. These were little task forces, whose strength and composition varied with the trackers and dogs available. In organizing and assigning them, the battalion commander would also have to weigh the advantages of centralized control against those of the good team relationship that comes with having tracker teams attached to companies. A tracking team might consist, for example, of 1 team commander (an experienced NCO), 3 Iban trackers, 1 dog handler, 1 tracker dog, and 3 riflemen.<sup>92</sup> Its mission would be simply to find guerrillas, not to fight. Fighting was the mission of the follow-up group.

Nor were the trackers magicians, able to produce guerrillas regardless of what the fighters had done. One observer reported that a common error was for a patrol to find a camp, charge through it, follow the best-looking track a short distance, go back to the camp, walk about it, and then, having effectively masked all scents, whistle up the tracking team. He suggested that any patrol, on finding an empty guerrilla camp or resting-place, should (1) halt without entering; (2) look and listen; (3) then,

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<sup>92</sup>ATOM, pp. XXI-5, XXI-9.

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if there was no sound or sign of guerrillas, call up the tracker, the dog, and his handler and with them cast about the camp before entering it; and (4) if nothing was found but the tracker thought that the camp was fresh, have the tracking team circle the camp closely to pick up the track.<sup>93</sup>

What could be done with tracking by a British battalion after these techniques had been worked out and assimilated was demonstrated by the 1st Battalion of the Loyal Regiment in May 1958. An ambush on the night of May 29 wounded two guerrillas. Night tracking in jungle is impossible (though dogs can operate in rubber), and the Loyals therefore waited for daylight to begin. By June 1 they had found a track, estimated as six hours old. At 7:15 the next morning, the Loyals assaulted an occupied resting-place and killed one state committee and one branch committee member; at 7:50, the follow-up wounded and captured still another member of the branch committee.<sup>94</sup>

<sup>93</sup>Capt. D. L. Bruce-Merrie, "With Gun and Dog Through the Chemor Hills," The Infantryman, August 1959, CONFIDENTIAL.

<sup>94</sup>"Formation History" in "War Diary Summary," 23 Commonwealth Brigade, 1958, SECRET.

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To the south in Johore State that same year, the 99th Gurkha Infantry Brigade destroyed the headquarters of the South Johore Region under Ah Ann by tracking its members through the jungle, unaided by either dogs or Iban trackers. Having first eliminated seventy of the ninety-five Armed Work Force members who supported the headquarters, the Gurkhas made their direct attack. It is worth noting that all their intelligence was combat intelligence, not Special Branch intelligence. That is to say, the brigade's several intelligence sections worked exclusively from interrogations of captured and surrendered terrorists, captured documents, and ground evidence.

The military performance of the Gurkhas was of the highest professional standard. Between October 4 and 16, 1958, for example, three battalions in turn tracked the fleeing guerrillas through 40 map miles of hilly jungle. The Gurkhas always tracked right up to last light. Three-man patrols stayed out for days with no evening meal and sleeping in wet clothes, for, to save weight, they would take no change of clothing with them. On occasion, platoons ate nothing for forty-eight hours so as not to lose valuable time with an airdrop.

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After two months of such intensive pursuit, the Gurkhas had killed, captured, or accepted the surrender of all but six of the guerrillas in South Johore. These six exceptions were thought by surrendered guerrillas to have left the fight and returned to the Chinese community as ex-Communists. The communist leader An Ann and his wife were killed on November 12, 1958.<sup>95</sup>

### KEEPING WELL

The Gurkhas by then had reached such a level of expertise and hardihood that they could sometimes break the accepted rules of health and judge quite precisely how much they were risking by sleeping in wet clothes and going without food. Such risks, however, were not to be taken as a matter of course. To keep well on operations was a matter of great importance. As already noted, Merrill's Marauders in 1944 were largely the victims of health hazards.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Capt. A.G.E. Stewart Cox, "Operation TIGER," The British Army Review, September 1959.

<sup>96</sup> Charles F. Romanus and Riley Sunderland, Stilwell's Command Problems, Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, Washington, D.C., 1956, p. 240.

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Success in keeping well, like so many things in war, presupposed the kind of discipline and high morale that enabled officers to insist that their men take their drugs and clean themselves and their gear, and made men willingly carry out preventive measures. In the 3d Battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment, every patrol leader, be he officer or NCO, carried a medical book in which he noted when his men took their daily anti-malaria pills; their malaria meant his court-martial.<sup>97</sup> The Coldstream Guards had its officers and NCOs supervise every soldier's nightly performance of his personal chores of bathing, cleaning of weapons, and putting on dry clothes for sleeping, and, to allow enough time for them, ordered the day's patrolling to stop at 1530 hours. Personal chores, if not found, could not be left till morning, lest they be neglected in the rush to break camp. Early in the Emergency, the men still wore underclothes, and these were also checked for cleanliness. Later, it was agreed that not only was their condition irrelevant, but underclothes as such were bad because they filled with perspiration and, by chafing the skin, could cause intolerable sores.

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<sup>97</sup> Interview with Col. White.

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The use of two suits of jungle green became standard. In the early days, the Gurkhas daily dried their clothing over the fire before putting it on, only to find that within minutes it was again soaked in sweat and that a set of clothes lasted them at most ten days. Then the practice grew up of having two suits of jungle-green twill. The soldier wore one, and carried the other in his pack, carefully wrapped in oilcloth or plastic to keep it dry. When he made camp, he took off the wet suit and laid it on a bush. Next he bathed, and then put on the clean dry suit in which he would sleep, comfortable in the cool Malayan night. Next morning, he carefully packed away his dry suit and put on the wet. When the wet suit wore out, he began wearing the spare during the day, and air supply delivered a new one for night wear.

Two daily baths and two changes of socks were the practice in some units later in the Emergency. As for care of the feet, the jungle boot was removed whenever possible so that feet might dry, the feet themselves were kept clean, and foot powder was used liberally. Looking back on his campaign experience in the jungle, one battalion commander said that the man who did not

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clean himself and his gun twice a day was likely to be out of action in a fortnight.<sup>98</sup>

Mite repellent was applied to all clothing to ward off the carrier of scrub typhus. The type used in Malaya stayed in clothing after washing but had to be renewed every two weeks.<sup>99</sup>

Strict discipline governed the consumption of water. No one was allowed to drink water that had not first been sterilized by tablets dissolved in the canteen for thirty minutes. Also, the men's intake was watched. They were not permitted to drink while hot or on the march, lest a chain reaction of fluid loss be set up that could be serious. The soldier was told to drink at least three-fourths of a canteen over and above his morning tea and then to take three salt tablets; he would feel no thirst until midday, and thereafter was advised to drink only when he was cool. The reasoning was that the dilated stomach of a hot, sweating man, if filled with water, added to the pressure on his bladder and thus caused too great a loss of fluid.

<sup>98</sup>Idem; Appendix B to "Quarterly Historical Report," 1/2 Gurkha Rifles, June 30, 1949, SECRET; Appendix A to "Quarterly Historical Report," 2 Coldstream Guards, June 30, 1949, SECRET.

<sup>99</sup>ATCM, p. XXIII-6.

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Among the more general aids to comfort, the 2 Coldstream Guards believed that shaving was of the greatest importance as a morale booster. They also cautioned the soldier to watch carefully over his equipment, which was easily lost in bushy, muddy bivouacs. Bamboo and betan palm, said a 1949 report of the Coldstream, made the best and quickest bashas, but they did not grow at altitudes of much above 3,000 feet. One could make fire in the rain by placing small pieces of split bamboo with the concave side up to run off the rain, or by paring heartwood of fallen branches into small slivers and lighting them. Unsplit bamboo was never to be thrown on a fire, as it exploded. These hints, however, applied to the unfortunates who, early in the Emergency, were still without the lightweight cooking stoves and hexamine fuel tablets that were issue equipment in 1959. By then, the Australians had some other comforts that would have delighted their predecessors, including parachute silk in lieu of blankets for the bed roll and a sheet of plastic instead of a poncho.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>100</sup>Appendix C to "Quarterly Historical Report," 2 Coldstream Guards, March 31, 1949. SECRET; "Operations in Malaya."

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The health record of two companies of the Coldstream reporting on an operation of several weeks in 1949 showed one case of heatstroke, three fevers of unknown origin, and a number of cases of athlete's foot, which in newcomers to Malaya sometimes spread to other parts of the body. Most soldiers on this operation felt well, except for stomach upsets and headaches during the first few days.<sup>101</sup> The experience reported by the Coldstream seems to have been a normal one.

### RATIONS

What to feed the soldier on operations was a lively issue. If he was supplied by air, it was important to have the rations so organized that they could be quickly and easily issued after a supply drop. And even when he was on air supply, he still on occasion had to carry his meals on his back, as he did on a self-contained five- to seven-day operation, so that their weight was always of importance. Here the guerrilla had the advantage, for he

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<sup>101</sup>Appendix A to "Quarterly Historical Report," 2 Coldstream Guards, June 30, 1949, SECRET. ATOM, Chapter XXIII, tersely states what the soldier must do to keep well; "Operational Standing Orders for the Emergency" in "Commander's Diary," 28 Commonwealth Brigade, March 1960, SECRET, stresses the taking of anti-malaria pills, water discipline, and use of mite repellent.

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could put a week's supply of rice (if he could get it) into an old stocking and move unencumbered by his rations' weight.

The answer to the rations problem varied somewhat among battalions, especially early in the Emergency, when the Gurkha liked one diet, the Australian another, the Malay a third, and the boy from Sussex still another. As time went on, however, they all tended to use curried dishes and rice. The Gurkha and the Malay ate them normally; the European soldier adopted them, partly because rice was lighter to carry than canned goods, and partly because, like so many Europeans, he came to like the taste of curry in the tropics. By 1959, the Australians were using a seven-day ration that weighed 24½ lbs., or 3½ lbs. a day. This was a major improvement over the early days, when rations were so heavy that the soldier was unable to carry more than a four-day supply;<sup>102</sup> reducing the weight by almost half was a great aid to mobility.

The absence of fresh fruit from the soldier's diet was recognized as a problem, and the Coldstream, therefore recommended that fresh fruit be included in every airdrop.<sup>103</sup>

<sup>102</sup>"Operations in Malaya"; "Quarterly Historical Report," 1 ROYLI (King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry), March 31, 1949, SECRET.

<sup>103</sup>Appendix C to "Quarterly Historical Report," 2 Coldstream Guards, March 31, 1949, SECRET.

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The packaging of rations was a headache in 1943-1949. After an airdrop, the salt often became mixed with the sugar, the items were hard to divide up among a patrol, and the packages failed to provide a midday snack for the soldier.<sup>104</sup> One must assume, however, that by 1959 many, if not all, of these problems had been overcome.

### JUNGLE NAVIGATION

The basic tools of orientation were map, compass, and protractor. The 1/63,360 map, based on aerial survey, was available. Its data on hills and streams were accurate, but growth was so fast in Malaya that up-to-date information on clearings and jungle edges had to be obtained from the operations room before one could begin map reconnaissance. Complete photo coverage was at hand in the later years of the Emergency, and stereo prints were used in conjunction with the map. Compass and protractor in combination were also needed, since visibility in the jungle was so limited that landmarks could not be seen.

In planning his route, the soldier was well advised to follow the grain of the country rather than a straight

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<sup>104</sup>Appendix D to "Quarterly Historical Report," 1/2 Gurkha R. Files, September 30, 1949, SECRET, severely criticized the then current ten-man ration.

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line, and to try moving on ridges and hills, using river banks as aids to direction but not as routes. Once the march was under way, checking was a continual process. Hills and streams were identified as they were reached, and the direction of the water's flow was checked against the map. Tracks were thought unreliable aids, but jungle edges could be useful provided one knew the prevailing pattern of cultivation. The distances covered were more dependably estimated on the basis of time spent, nature of terrain, and similar factors than by counting paces. If it desired, a platoon could get a six-figure grid reference by flying marker balloons. These would then be spotted by Austers called up for the occasion, who would signal the platoon its position.<sup>105</sup>

Even after the basic rules of jungle navigation had been learned and practiced, incidents occurred that taught the soldiers some simple facts. Once, for example, a platoon of the Worcestershires left its bivouac at dawn, moving northwest by compass. At the first halt, the platoon leader walked back along his column and found but

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<sup>105</sup> ATOM, Chapter IX, on jungle navigation; see also Capt. P.W. Ford, "Operation WHITE CHRISTMAS," The Oak Tree (published by the Cheshire Regiment), Winter 1957.

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eight of his thirty men. With two men for cover, he began a search. After an hour he himself was lost, and it took another three hours for the three-man rescue party to be guided back to their unit by a prearranged homing signal, a series of shots. When the missing twenty-two had been found, it appeared that the two radio signalers had been marching as Nos. 9 and 10 in the column. Their heavy equipment had slowed them down, and at an interval of 10 yards they had lost sight of No. 8 ahead of them and had begun veering off in a wrong direction. From this, the Worcestershires drew two lessons: (1) keep in sight; (2) make the necessary allowances for heavy equipment in setting the marching speed.<sup>106</sup>

### THE SOLDIER'S LOAD

An ordinary rifleman in the Suffolk Regiment carried the following load:

- Spare jungle suit -- kept dry for night wear
- 2 spare pairs of socks
- Pair of rubber-soled shoes (the jungle boot -- made to let water drain out)
- Tin of cigarettes and matches (discarded in later years, with the prohibition of smoking in the jungle)

<sup>106</sup> Lt. B. A. Parker, A History of the 1st Battalion the Worcestershire Regiment in Malaya, 1950-1953, as serialized in Magazine of the Worcestershire Regiment, July 1954, p. 109.

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Tin for water tablets  
Jackknife  
Washing kit  
Mess tin and spoon  
Rifle-cleaning kit  
Bottle of mite repellent  
Bottle of mosquito repellent  
5 days' food  
Machete  
Water bottle  
String  
Grenades  
Poncho cape<sup>107</sup>

In 1949, the weight of the soldier's routine load was 60lbs., to which must be added his share of extra signal equipment, such as batteries. This was recognized as a heavy load in a trying climate and on mountain terrain.<sup>108</sup> It is easy to see how much the signallers would be slowed down by the additional weight of their radio equipment.

### MORALE

No poll is available that would give a precise measure of the soldiers' morale in Malaya. However, the regimental journals convey a picture of consistently high morale. The credibility of these journals derives from the fact that, given the close regimental bonds in the British army, they are almost family letters. The journal writer is addressing

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<sup>107</sup> Maj. Arthur Campbell, MC, Jungle Green, London, 1953, p. 165.

<sup>108</sup> "Quarterly Historical Report," 1 KGYLI, March 31, 1949, SECRET.

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an audience of practical soldiers, many of whom have served with him and remained in close professional touch with him, and thus are bound to detect any false note in his narrative. Looking back on his tour in Malaya with the Hampshires, one commentator wrote:

Even right up to the last days of operations, when Company Sergeant Major Baws had to take out an extremely uncomfortable ambush, there was no question of having to detail anyone, rather one of selecting the more deserving soldier.

.....  
We may not have been aware of it at the time, but there was something real and satisfying in the type of soldiering we did in Malaya. Not so much the comradeship, nor the easier and more cooperative discipline, although these were factors. Rather it was the development of a deeply satisfying quality of manhood, the spirit of the hunter; the coupling of a pride in physical fitness with a real sense of adventure. Hunting has always been a manly sport, a sport which tests manhood. When such hunting is directed against man himself and the enemy is cruel, resolute, cunning, and brave, when he lives in a deep, exciting jungle which becomes his element, then the hunter must be of high mettle, his manhood challenged as in no other walk of life. Not everyone has been aware of this challenge, yet it was

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undoubtedly there, and from its acceptance came the lasting pleasure of operations in Malaya.<sup>109</sup>

<sup>109</sup> "Y Company Notes," The Royal Hampshire Regiment Journal, November 1956. Brig. Richard Miers, then commanding the 1st Battalion, the South Wales Borderers, reports that his men would have given their eye teeth and a week's pay for a chance at an interesting ambush (Shoot To Kill, Chapter VII).

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VIII. THE ULU LANGAT OPERATION

What good troops could do in the jungle was demonstrated by the Ulu Langat operation, in which the Hampshires' display of skill compared with the Gurkhas' elimination of the Johore guerrilla headquarters. At 1700 hours on December 10, 1955, Special Branch reported to the Hampshires that seventeen guerrillas were encamped near the village of Ulu Langat, taking a course of instruction. Among them was the ranking Communist of Selangor State, the secretary of the state committee. To help the troops find the camp, the police was providing an SEP as guide. (Presumably, this was a man who had had a change of heart and was prepared to lead the Security Forces to his former comrades, who were unaware of his defection.)

The Hampshires decided that the critical problem was to place a cordon into position around three sides of the camp before the guerrillas took alarm. It meant moving a body of men through the jungle with the utmost care and precision. This central problem broke down into three components: (1) the route to be taken to the general area of the camp, (2) the timing of the approach march and of the actual assault on the camp; (3) the method of assault.

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The choice of the approach route was a considerable problem. For one thing, the Hampshires could not use the track that the SEP knew, because it was being ambushed by police who could not be withdrawn or warned in time. Moreover, a fair-sized river could only be crossed at one of two bridges. The decision was to try a tricky bit of navigation and to use the more remote bridge after a few hours, then follow the jungle edge north, and finally cut east into the jungle to end the approach in an area near the camp. The march was estimated from the map at 7,000 yards.

In preparing for the move, the Hampshires took certain sophisticated precautions, such as forbidding anyone to carry soap, machetes, or cigarettes. The police provided vehicles to take the place of the noisier army trucks, and undertook to keep tappers out of the near-by rubber plantations.

The march through the rubber was begun in the dead of night. Whenever the column threatened to break up, soft whistles brought it together again. At 0240 hours, after about 200 yards had been made in this way, the commander decided that the strain was not worth the progress and halted until dawn. At 0545 the march resumed.

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Once the Hampshires had turned east into the jungle-covered hills, they had to cast about in several directions trying to find the section of track that the SEP wanted to use to close on the guerrilla camp. When they finally got their bearings, they found the guerrilla camp 300 yards away, not 800 as expected. The Hampshires had camouflaged and moved so silently that the guerrillas had heard and suspected nothing. It was now 0900 on December 12; the search for that track alone had taken many hours.

The next two hours were spent in siting a cordon of two platoons, the process luckily covered by a pouring rain that deadened sound. At 1100, the assault party and the rest of the cordon began taking position. At 1310, all were in place. The assault party was 50 yards from the camp, on the far side of a bad ravine. Because the camp was an instruction center, all the guerrillas were likely to be present.

On a hand signal at 1320, the assault party broke into four teams and trotted forward. Ten yards into the ravine, the task-force commander yelled "Fire!" and opened on the cookhouse basha. The guerrillas bolted, and for the next twenty minutes tried to work their way past the cordons. Then the firing tapered off, and the

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mopping-up and the count began. Five guerrillas had died before the south cordon, and six before the east. A woman was captured. One guerrilla escaped briefly, to be picked up later. One of the Hampshires was slightly wounded by wood splinters.<sup>110</sup>

It must be remembered that the men of the Hampshires were not jungle specialists but members of a line regiment. They were British infantry doing the infantryman's job in Malaya.

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<sup>110</sup>"The Ulu Langat Operation, December 12th, 1955," The Royal Hampshire Regiment Journal, February 1956. Analyzing unsuccessful attacks on camps, the British Operation Research Section, Far East, concluded that the main cause of failure when stops or cordons were used was that they were not properly placed when the assault was made. Note that, in the successful case described above, the fleeing guerrillas ran head-on into the cordon. The timing of the attack in this case reflected knowledge of guerrilla habits, that is, of the fact that this was a school and that all those attending could be expected to be present at certain hours. Normally, 6:30 to 7 p.m. was the best time for an attack (Memo No. 8/54, SECRET).

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### IX. AIR SUPPORT

Though attention thus far has been focused on army operations, these would have been very seriously handicapped without air supply; as the Director of Operations pointed out in 1954, the whole pattern of antiguerrilla operations depended on it.<sup>111</sup> However, the support of the ground troops by the several Commonwealth air forces went beyond the supply mission. It gave the Commonwealth armed forces an advantage for which the Communists could never fully compensate. Moreover, experience gradually uncovered uses for the field artillery, the traditional supporting arm of the infantry. After the first few years of the Emergency, the potential of artillery and air support was a factor in all Commonwealth army operations.

The range of air support in Malaya is suggested by the fact that the RAF and squadrons from Australia, New Zealand, Malaya, and the Royal Navy furnished air supply; troop transport; casualty evacuation; photo reconnaissance; visual reconnaissance; communication flights; leaflet drops; voice broadcasts; precision bombardment; area bombardment; strafing with rocket and machine gun; crop

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<sup>111</sup> Director's Annual Report, 1954, p. 12.

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spraying; and air observation of artillery fire. The scale of this effort between 1948 and 1957 is shown in Fig. 17. When the Emergency began, the offensive air potential was a fighter squadron reinforced by occasional flying-boat sorties. By mid-1950, Malaya Air Command was up to two squadrons each of single, twin-, and four-engine aircraft. In 1957, it had a squadron of LINCOLN heavy bombers and three squadrons of VENOM fighter-bombers. By 1953-1954, the original piston-engined aircraft, except the LINCOLNs, had been replaced by jets, for Malaya had to have air cover in case of major hostilities in Southeast Asia, and the British could not have supported two air forces.<sup>112</sup>

After some initial disagreement as to the direction of the air effort, it was decided that district and state war executive committees could call on a mobile team of Air Staff planners, while control was centralized under the Air Officer Commanding (AOC), Malaya. All bids for air from army, police, and civil administration were channeled through the Joint Operations Center (JOC), the controlling

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<sup>112</sup>Group-Capt. K.R.C. Slater, "Air Operations in Malaya," Journal of the Royal United Services Institution, 1958 (hereafter, "Slater"); Report on 1948-1957, p. 20.

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FIG. 17. AIR POWER IN THE MALAYAN EMERGENCY\*

1. Order of Battle													
TYPE OF SUPPORT		TYPE OF AIRCRAFT	SQUADRONS AVAILABLE FOR OPERATIONS IN										
			Jun 48	Sep 49	Jul 50	Aug 51	Dec 52	Dec 53	Dec 54	Dec 55	Dec 56	Aug 57	
Defensive		Single-Engine	1	2	2	1	1	1	1	3	3	-	
		Twin-Engine	-	1	2	2-3/4	3	2	2	1	-	-	
		Four-Engine	-	-	2	1	1	2	1 1/2	1	1	-	
		Flying Boat (on call)	1	1	2	1 1/2	1 1/2	1 1/2	2	2	2	-	
Transport		Single-Engine	-	-	-	-	-	-	1 Flt	-	-	-	
		Twin-Engine	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	Det. 4th East Transp Wng	-	-	
		Light Helicopters	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	1	-	
Reconnaissance		Medium Helicopters	-	-	-	-	-	1	2	2	1	-	
		Various (Photo)	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	-	
		Auster (Visual)	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	-	
Communications		Composition has varied widely. At present, Communications: 8 Pioneers, 3 Harvards, 3 Pembroke; Voice Aircraft: 2 Austers, 3 Dakotas.											
2. Air Effort													
Monthly Averages for Periods as Shown													
Weight of bombs (short tons) rockets bombs fired (thousands) Supplies dropped (short tons) Passengers Leaflets dropped (thousands)	Jul 48	Apr 49	Jan 51	Sep 51	Mar 52	Feb 52	1953	1954	1955	1956	Jan 57	Aug 57	
	8	323	619	454	340	264	264	406	332	158	75	-	
	139	1293	2732	2453	801	494	494	326	258	73	71	-	
	3	112	175	175	181	102	102	81	56	15	3	-	
	13	133	277	94	125	174	174	286	324	171	205	-	
	1071	372	1284	1443	1389	1614	1614	1519	3145	3123	2554	-	
-	596	1425	272	1145	643	643	6686	1765	8068	6862	-	-	

\*Director of Operations, Malaya, Review of the Emergency in Malaya from June 1948 to August 1957.  
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agency for the day-to-day conduct of air operations. The JOC was in Main Air, next to Headquarters Malaya Command, where the AOC and the General Officer Commanding, Malaya, had adjoining offices. The system resembled rather closely the normal British field army/tac air arrangement.<sup>113</sup>

Of the air support functions, troop transport and casualty evacuation were largely helicopter missions. The helicopter's contribution was summed up in the saying that a minute in the helicopter over bad ground was equal to a day in the jungle. The saving in troop fatigue was obvious, but equally important, though less obvious, was the fact that by using helicopters one could dispense with paratroops and use the ordinary infantryman. Paratroop units were considered very vulnerable, because of the difficulty of finding replacements for these highly skilled men when they were incapacitated by injuries.

The Commonwealth forces normally did not use helicopters for assault landings, for to do so was to sacrifice the advantage of surprise. Rather, they used the helicopter to bring troops as quietly as possible near the projected base site within the assigned area of operations. The

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<sup>113</sup>Ibid.

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belief was that any sort of aircraft could operate up to 1,000 yards downwind of the Communists without being heard, or 5,000 feet upwind if the throttle was kept down.<sup>114</sup>

Of even greater importance than the ability to surprise the Communists by inserting troops quickly and quietly into the deep jungle was the boost in morale to the Commonwealth forces that came from casualty evacuation by helicopter. Previously, the ever-present prospect of a man's suffering or death on the slow, jolting stretcher journey out of the jungle had been a depressing reality. Also, evacuating the wounded by stretcher meant having to provide teams of carriers plus an escort, and this would effectively immobilize a platoon and thus, conceivably, could mean the canceling of an operation. These considerations led General Ritchie, who commanded FARELF when the Emergency began, to say that casualty evacuation caused him the greatest of anxiety and to describe the need for helicopters as imperative.<sup>115</sup> With their arrival the picture changed. An aid team could come in, prepare the man for travel, and take him directly to a general hospital.

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<sup>114</sup> Interview with Gen. Brooke.

<sup>115</sup> Idem; "Ritchie Report," p. 14.

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The major drawback of the helicopter was its cost. Discounting overhead, the medium helicopter cost £78 an hour to operate, as compared to £35 for a fixed-wing airplane of the same load capacity. The then current light helicopter cost £58 an hour, as against £13 for the versatile Auster light airplane.<sup>116</sup> For a meaningful American equivalent of the buying power of these figures within the Commonwealth, one must multiply by five, rather than use the 1963 exchange rate of about \$2.81 to the pound.

A comprehensive photo survey of Malaya was completed early in 1953. Operationally significant areas were periodically reflown to keep the survey up to date. The results of the survey were used to amend maps, pinpoint communist camps and cultivated areas, and prepare target maps.<sup>117</sup> Checking on the camera and supplementing its coverage were the eyes of the Auster pilots, members of No. 656 AOP Squadron, for the human eye could find things in the jungle that the camera could not. Each pilot was allotted an area of jungle that he came to know intimately. He also had his bag of professional tricks to avoid

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<sup>116</sup>Slater, passim.

<sup>117</sup>Ibid.

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disturbing the guerrillas, such as flying downwind, gliding, and contour-flying. There was the occasion when an Auster pilot flying along the Thai-Malay border (by agreement with Thailand) spotted a camp in Thailand that the cameras had failed to see. Any such sightings were promptly followed up. For some years detection was aided by the guerrillas' Chinese habit of planting vegetables in orderly rows, until the guerrillas realized that this was giving away their locations. Visual reconnaissance was also useful for checking on friendly troops (to make sure, for example, that cordons were properly sited).<sup>118</sup>

Ten pioneer aircraft supplied communication flights and were thought invaluable in that role. In 1955 they carried 5,446 personnel and 181 tons of freight.<sup>119</sup>

Psychological warfare was a most useful weapon against the Communists, and aircraft carried the essential means for presenting ideas to guerrillas in the jungle: leaflets and broadcasts. In 1953, 54 million leaflets on general topics, and another 23 million addressed to specific

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<sup>118</sup> Interview with Gen. Brooke, who stated that recent developments in the production of highly sensitive film had greatly increased the capability of aerial photography.

<sup>119</sup> Director's Annual Report, 1955, p. 13.

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individuals or groups, were dropped over guerrilla areas.<sup>120</sup> Leaflet-dropping seems to have been left ad hoc to available aircraft. Voice-broadcast missions, because of the specialized equipment required, were assigned to specific planes. The "voice flight" was formed in 1953. Though its equipment varied from one period to another, it normally included two or three transports and two or three Austers.<sup>121</sup>

Bombing and strafing the guerrillas involved several serious problems for the airmen. First of all, the jungle cover made target identification very difficult. Second, after the Communist Party's change in policy in December 1948, the guerrillas would not try to hold ground. Finally, because of the absence of such vital points as bridges, crossroads, and marshaling yards in the jungle, the ground itself offered no attractive targets. Yet some information about guerrilla camps did come in, and it was hoped that, with increasing knowledge of the guerrilla, the known facts of his position could be more profitably exploited.

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<sup>120</sup>"Information Services," Federation Report, 1953.

<sup>121</sup>Slater, passim.

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By 1955, the Directorate of Operations, Malaya, had come to think of bombing as one more form of pressure on the guerrilla.<sup>122</sup> Like hunger or the activities of the Special Branch, bombing could be used to force him into making himself a target or into surrendering and was itself a casualty-producing agent.

Fighter-bombers, mediums, as well as heavies were used. By 1952 the Operational Research Section of the Far East Air Force had decided that the nose-fuzed 1000-lb. bomb was outstandingly effective, and the 500-lb. the next best. Tail-fuzed bombs and rockets were believed unsuited to the jungle. The 350-lb. cluster was thought useful.<sup>123</sup> Precision bombing and area bombing were the methods used. When information seemed to justify it, heavy bombers would strike at a precise target, thoroughly covering an area of 300x400 yards. They were guided to the target by modified GL radar, surveyed in, which gave the bombardier his release point. In 1956 this technique was used to eliminate Goh Peng Tuan, political commissar

<sup>122</sup>Director's Annual Report, 1955, p. 15.

<sup>123</sup>General Staff, Intelligence, Hq FARELF, "Notes on Malaya and the Emergency, 1949-1952," February 1, 1952, SECRET.

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of the 7th Independent Platoon. Radar was placed on a hill some 5,000 yards from the site of his camp; then the LINCOLN heavies came in and dropped 45 tons of bombs in an area 700x400 yards. The camp itself had been located by a platoon of the South Wales Borderers. Though Goh's death had a great impact on the local inhabitants, it did not seem to disrupt the guerrillas' organization. It was different, however, in May 1957, when the same technique was used to eliminate Teng Foo-lung, of the Negri Sembilan State Committee. Teng's group disintegrated, its remnants surrendered the following December, and the coastal and central areas of the state were thereupon declared "white."<sup>124</sup>

Area bombardment had three principal aims: (1) to kill guerrillas directly, or to keep them on the move and so increase the army's chances of contacting and killing them; (2) to disrupt the guerrilla command and base organization; (3) to lower guerrilla morale by creating a sense of insecurity in their hideouts. As regards points (1) and (3), General Frank Brooke, who was Director of Operations in the last years of the Emergency, later quoted guerrillas

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<sup>124</sup> Interview with Gen. Brooke; Miller MS, pp. V-12ff. and V-23.

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who had come over as reporting that, when they were bombed, they would dig themselves in and feel safe. The question of the utility and the timing of this technique thus remains open to a final judgment.<sup>125</sup>

In the early days of the Emergency, however, when the guerrillas were still working toward a point at which they might begin to fight as formed units, the men who successfully directed the defense had no doubts as to the usefulness of aerial bombardment. General Ritchie said that normal tactical air support for troops had often been invaluable. The General Officer Commanding, Singapore, said on January 10, 1949, that he would accept no excuses for failing to make full use of air, artillery, and mortars. (His advocating artillery was in advance of local practice.) And, despite the legends that grew up later, the RAF on occasion laid the bombs right on target even in the early days. Thus, a patrol of the 2/2 Gurkha Rifles once found four guerrillas buried near the site of an air strike. And on August 15, 1949, a strike by three BEAUFIGHTERS and two HARVARDS aimed at a meeting of the Malacca state committee killed one Communist and resulted in the capture

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<sup>125</sup> Interview with Gen. Brooke; Slater.

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of quantities of documents and equipment. (It was later reported that the majority of the committee had burst eardrums.)<sup>126</sup>

In October 1953, a committee appointed by the Director of Operations agreed that the chemical spraying of guerrilla cultivation from the air had been successful. It also pointed out that photo interpretation to spot guerrilla gardens was a bottleneck because Malaya did not have the staff to do it at the required rate, and that visual reconnaissance was far slower than desirable. The reporting committee thought that the defoliation of areas surrounding guerrilla gardens was an important by-product of spraying. It went on to recommend that some of the gardens so spotted should be left untouched, to be used as killing grounds by the army and police later on.<sup>127</sup>

The use of light aircraft to register artillery was the same as in normal American practice. It depended in a given case on whether there was a good checkpoint that

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<sup>126</sup> "Ritchie Report," p. 10; "Minutes of the Commanders' Conference Held at Johore Sub-District on 10 January 1949," SECRET; Weekly LUM No. 21, Hq North Malaya Sub-District, February 1, 1949, SECRET; "Quarterly Historical Report," FA'ELF G(Ops/SD) Branch, September 30, 1949, SECRET.

<sup>127</sup> U.S. Liaison Office, Malaya, "Destruction of CT Cultivator," November 2, 1953, ID 1190205.

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the observer could see and from which fire could be shifted. In tree-covered Malaya, such checkpoints were not always at hand when desired.

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### X. ARTILLERY SUPPORT

On September 19, 1957, the General Officer Commanding the 17th Gurkha Division, Maj. Gen. R. N. Anderson, pulled the lanyard and sent the 1,000,000th artillery round of the Emergency off into the jungle.<sup>128</sup> That the Royal Artillery had run up such a figure suggests how busy its two batteries in Malaya were kept. When the Emergency began, the gunners were used as infantrymen, as noted above. By February 1951, this had been recognized as a mistake, and the field battery, armed with 25-pdr gun howitzers, was reconstituted. In the Commonwealth forces, this was a unit with six cannon, which in turn might break down into three lettered troops. These troops, with two cannon each, could operate separately for five to six weeks at a time. But the "roving gun" was uneconomical; it took about 190 men of all ranks to keep three two-gun troops operational and secure.<sup>129</sup>

How a field battery could perform was demonstrated by the 93d. In November 1952, its three troops were in

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<sup>128</sup>ARMA, Malaya, "Artillery Tactics," December 19, 1957, IAC 2067678, SECRET; "War Diary," 48 Field Regiment RA, SECRET.

<sup>129</sup>"25 Field Regiment History, 1 April 1952 - 31 March 1953," Appendix A, SECRET.

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as many states, two of them 465 miles apart, and its six guns fired 12,643 rounds among them, the record in Malaya to that date.<sup>130</sup>

The 93d cites the example of a Scottish battalion as demonstrating what should not be asked of artillery. That battalion allocated its supporting guns to its rifle companies not according to need or prior planning but simply by turns. Then it would give them such impossible tasks as placing fire in two areas, each 10,000x26,000 yards, to keep guerrillas from escaping through them.<sup>131</sup>

The tactical usefulness of artillery in Malaya can perhaps be traced to resettlement and food denial on the one hand, and to the guerrillas' desire to keep in touch with the people on the other. If many guerrillas had gone far into the jungle, the food problem would have become insoluble, they would have found it very hard to influence the people, and the flow of information from population centers would probably have been so little and so late in reaching them as to be almost useless. Therefore, the Armed Work Forces and the Min Yuen had to operate in the

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

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jungle fringe, within range of the 25-pdr and 5.5-in guns that were squatting in clearings near the roads.

### THE EMPLOYMENT OF ARTILLERY

Looking back on experiences in Malaya, with its jungle cover and widely scattered battalions, the commander of the 25th Field Regiment tried, in 1952, to lay down principles to be followed by both gunner and infantryman in obtaining the most profitable employment of the guns. He began by comparing the merits of artillery and air. The 25-pdrs, he said, could flush guerrillas out of thick cover and into ambush positions manned by the army; they could drive guerrillas onto ground of one's own choosing; keep them on the move by harassing fire and by fire aimed at the destruction of known camps, dumps, and rendezvous; raise civilian morale; and deceive the enemy by firing into areas of indifference to the Security Forces. Artillery could furnish support in any weather and at any time. He maintained that it was more accurate than bombing, could therefore be brought closer to friendly troops, and could keep up a sustained effort over several days.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid., Annex to October 1952 entry.

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(Over the next few years, higher authority apparently came to similar conclusions, for in 1955 there were forty-four light and medium pieces in Malaya, compared to only sixteen the year before, and each battalion was issued two 4.2-in mortars, as against two 3-in mortars in 1954.)<sup>133</sup>

But, from the point of view of the practical gunner, the commander had to acknowledge the limitations on artillery in Malaya. Observation was very difficult, in most cases possible only from an air observation post. And survey was not as reliable as one normally would expect, because accurate maps and up-to-date retro data were lacking. (To call Malayan maps inaccurate in this context is not to contradict the earlier description of their usefulness in patrolling, for the patrol leader and the gunner have different needs and read maps with different eyes.) The artilleryman went on to say that, unless fire was observed, it should not be brought closer to friendly troops than 500 yards. If observed, fire could be closed to 200 yards.

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<sup>133</sup> Director's Annual Report, 1955, p. 11. The 1955 Report adds that, in Selangor alone, 55,885 rounds of 25-pdr and 5,835 rounds of 4.2-in ammunition were fired; one troop of medium and three sections of heavy antiaircraft were present.

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The field battery in Malaya had three two-gun troops, each of two officers, three NCOs, thirty-seven enlisted men, and eleven vehicles. Tactically, technically, and administratively, the troop was the smallest self-contained unit. However, when attached to a battalion, it relied on the latter for help with rations, medical care, POL, pay, mail, and, occasionally, emergency maintenance. After five or six weeks, the commander suggested, a troop should return to its battery for ten to fourteen days' retraining and maintenance. He recommended further that roving guns be used for no more than a few hours at a time, and then only close to the main troop position to which they could quickly and easily return after completing this mission. A gun could fire about twenty-five rounds a day in normal tactical situations; a higher rate meant undue wear.

If the troop fired at night, the commander of the 25th Field Regiment urged that there be rest periods, and that the troops be given two to three days of rest out of every fourteen. In the planning of operations, he suggested, the battalions' requests for artillery support should be submitted in enough detail to permit their full evaluation. The regimental commander should then weigh

the requests of his various battalions and establish priorities accordingly, allotting to each battalion the artillery support it needed for the accomplishment of specific tasks. Guns should not be allocated to battalions simply by turns.<sup>134</sup>

#### DAILY TASKS

The daily experience of the artillery in Malaya was often similar to that of units fighting in other wars. For example, there would be the emergency call for fire support. Thus, in February 1953, G Troop of the aforementioned 93d Field Battery received a request for fire from the 1st Battalion of the Queen's Own Royal West Kents; twenty minutes later, it had moved two miles, occupied position, and opened fire.

The gunners also used forward observers. The same troop had a forward observer with the 2d Battalion of the Malay Regiment, when on June 19, 1952, the request came to fire on a guerrilla camp. Thirteen minutes later, three guerrillas were killed in an ambush into which fire had driven them. That month (June 1952) E and G troops of the 93d received more fire missions than they could handle.

<sup>134</sup> "93d Field Regiment History," Annex to October 1952 entry.

The burden on battery in Malaya is suggested by the performance of the 93d between August 1952 and January 1953: 135

Fig. 18

RECORD OF THE 93D FIELD BATTERY  
AUGUST 1952 - JANUARY 1953

Month	Mileage	Gun positions occupied	Rounds fired
Aug '52	1,015	10	8,053
Sep '52	1,051	14	6,906
Oct '52	1,576	18	10,434
Nov '52	1,786	22	12,643
Dec '52	1,313	7	6,546
Jan '53	1,646	30	17,262

The last years of the Emergency brought no lessening of interest in artillery. In 1955 the 1st Federation Division had a field battery plus one section of heavy antiaircraft, the 17th Makkha Division had a field battery plus two troops, and the 18th Independent Infantry Brigade Group had a troop plus one heavy antiaircraft section.<sup>136</sup> This, roughly, was the organizational pattern from then on. In 1957, artillery missions included shelling a track

<sup>135</sup>The following figures are taken from "25 Field Regiment History," Appendix A.

<sup>136</sup>Operational Instruction No. 4, issued by Hq 25 Field Regiment FA on November 24, 1955, at 1700 hours (cf. entry in the regimental 'War Diary' for that date).

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
to drive guerrillas from the gardens, and the guerrillas into the hills; and the camp areas. Most of the guerrillas registered in the observation post.

### RESULTS

Shelling of the Posing-Sipa area by the Commonwealth forces on January 14, 1957, had contact with the guerrillas. During this first in two weeks, the guerrillas were fired by small fire which had been in the Posing-Sipa area. In January 1957, B Troop of the Commonwealth forces near Li Chuan's village, Posing-Sipa area, Li Chuan's village of his comrades. The guerrillas had been buried it.<sup>138</sup>

In February 1958, after the Posing-Sipa area, the Armed Work Forces had been moved into the ridge area to the west of Posing and the Communist commander and four other guerrillas had then been killed and many captured, the artillery was used to increase the pressure on the guerrillas until they were completely

<sup>137</sup>"War Diary," 48 Field Regiment RA, October 1957, SECRET; "War Diary," 95 Field Regiment RA, June 1957, SECRET.  
<sup>138</sup>"Notes on Brigade Commander's Conference," 14 July 1958, "Annex M, 28 Commonwealth Brigade Commander's Dis- SECRET; "War Diary," 75 Field Regiment RA, July 1957, SECRET.